CITY HILIGHTS

The Truth Speaks

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India turned its diversity into strength of democracy: PM

Modi said the scale of India's democracy is truly extraordinary and the country has a long tradition of debate, dialogue and collective decision-making

NEW DELHI

India has successfully turned its teeming diversity into the strength of its democracy and shown the world that democratic institutions and processes give stability, speed and scale to its development.

Inaugurating the 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC) at Samvidhan Sadan in New Delhi on Thursday, the Prime Minister said India has a long tradition of debate, dialogue and collective decision-making, in reference to it being called the 'Mother of Democracy'. "India's democracy is like a large tree supported by deep roots," he said.

'India's democracy means last-mile delivery'

"In India, democracy means last mile delivery. We work for all, without any discrimination, in the spirit of public welfare. This spirit also helped lift 25 crore people out of poverty," he said.

Recalling doubts expressed at the time of Independence, Modi said, "When India won its freedom, many doubted whether democracy could survive amidst the country's immense diversity. However, this very diversity became the strength of Indian democracy."

'India's UPI, vaccine, steel sectors set global records'

PM Modi underlined feats such as India's UPI being the world's biggest digital payments system, its status as the world's largest vaccine producer, the second-largest steel producer, and having the third-largest startup ecosystem and aviation market in the world. It also had the fourth-largest railway network in addition to the third-largest metro rail network, while being the biggest milk producer and the second-largest rice producer in the world.

"There was also scepticism that even if democracy did take root, India would struggle to progress. Contrary to these doubts, India has demonstrated that democratic institutions and processes provide stability, scale, and speed to its development," the PM said.

'A voice of Global South'

Positioning India as a leading voice of the Global South, Modi said the world was going through "unprecedented times" and called for new pathways for developing nations.

"In every global platform, India is steadfast in raising the issues that are beneficial to the Global South. During its G20 Presidency, India placed the priorities of the Global South at the centre of its international agenda," he said.

About 60 speakers and presiding officers are attending the event being held at the Samvidhan Sadan in Parliament House complex here from January 14 to 16. It is deliberating on a wide range of contemporary parliamentary issues, including the role of speakers and presiding officers, in maintaining strong democratic institutions.

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in parliamentary functioning, the impact of social media on members of Parliament, innovative strategies to enhance public understanding of Parliament and citizen participation beyond voting, among others, are also being discussed at the conference.

I-PAC RAIDS

Big blow to Mamata! SC stays FIRs against ED sleuths

NEW DELHI

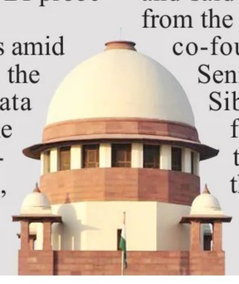
In a major setback to the Mamata Banerjee government in West Bengal and the Kolkata police, the Supreme Court on Thursday paused the FIRs registered against officers of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with their searches against the political consultancy I-PAC.

The bench of Justice Prashant Mishra and Justice Vipul Pancholi has also sought replies from the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Department of Personnel and Training, Mamata Banerjee and the TMC government on the ED's petition seeking the suspension of Bengal's DGP Rajeev Kumar and Kolkata Police Commissioner Manoj Kumar Verma among others. The SC has also sought a reply to the petition for a CBI probe in the matter.

The ruling comes amid a face-off between the ED and the Mamata government after the latter raided premises of I-PAC, which handles election campaigns for the Trinamool Congress, in Salt Lake and the residence of its director, Pratik Jain, in connection with a coal smuggling case.

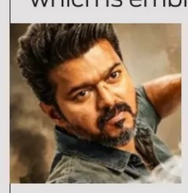
The SC said it is of the prima facie view that the Central agency's petition raises a serious issue relating to probe and interference by state agencies. "There are larger questions which emerge and if not answered shall lead to lawlessness. If central agencies are working bona fide to probe a serious offence, a question arises: Can they be obstructed by party activities?" the court said. The matter will be heard next on February 3. The ED has accused Banerjee and West Bengal officials of interfering with its probe and searches on I-PAC offices.

Appearing for the ED, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta accused Banerjee of "theft" and said she took evidence from the residence of I-PAC co-founder Pratik Jain. Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal , who appeared for Banerjee, questioned the need for the ED to go to Bengal ahead of the assembly polls.



SC snub shocks Vijay's 'Jana Nayagan', release now in trouble

Chennai: In a setback for Vijay-starrer 'Jana Nayagan', the Supreme Court on Thursday declined to grant an urgent hearing on a petition filed by the makers of the upcoming Tamil film, which is embroiled in a certification row. The producers had moved the SC challenging a Madras High Court interim order that stayed a single-judge directive asking the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) to grant a UA certificate to the film. A division bench of the HC has deferred further hearing in the matter until January 21, after the Pongal holidays, effectively putting the film's release on hold.



2 girls found dead at SAI Hostel in Kerala

KOLLAM (KERALA)

Two teenage girl athletes, both trainees staying at a SAI hostel, were found dead in one of their rooms on Thursday in an apparent suicide pact, the police said.

As per the police, the deceased are Sandra A (18) from Kozhikode and Vyshnavi V (15) from Thiruvananthapuram. Sandra, a Plus Two student, was an athletics trainee, while Vyshnavi was a kabaddi player and a Class 10 student.

The discovery was made at around 5 am when hostel stadd checked the girls' room after they did not report for training. When repeated attempts to contact them failed, they forced open the door and found them hanging.

India prepares evacuation plan as airlines cancel flights

NEW DELHI

India is drawing up contingency plans to evacuate its nationals from Iran amid a rapidly deteriorating securi-ty situation, with the US not ruling out military action against Tehran over its crackdown on nationwide protests.

IRAN UNREST

Official sources on Thursday said the Ministry of External Affairs is preparing to facilitate the return of Indian nationals who wish to come back to India. The government is also exploring the use of both civil and military transport aircraft for a possible evacuation, as per agencies.

US redirects carrier strike group toward Middle East

Washington: The US Navy has redirected the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group from the Indo-Pacific to the Middle East amid rising tensions with Iran. The shift underscores Washington's intent to reinforce deterrence and protect US forces and partners amid rising regional risks. In a notable shift in the naval deployments, the US Navy has ordered the Strike Group to transit from the Indo-Pacific to the Middle East, according to US defense officials. The move comes as US policymakers weigh growing concerns over Iranian regional activity, including actions by Tehran's affiliated militias, and seek to ensure sufficient combat power is positioned to respond quickly if the security environment deteriorates.

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರ

ಕನ್ನಡ ಮತ್ತು ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿ ಇಲಾಖೆ
ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು

ಕೈಗಾರಿಕಾ ವಲಯ ಹಾಗೂ ವಿವಿಧ
ಖಾಸಗಿ ಸಂಘ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳ ಸಹಭಾಗಿತ್ವದಲ್ಲಿ

ಶ್ರೀ ಸಿದ್ದರಾಮಯ್ಯ
ಸನ್ಮಾನ್ಯ ಮುಖ್ಯಮಂತ್ರಿಗಳು

ಶ್ರೀ ಡಿ.ಕೆ. ಶಿವಕುಮಾರ್
ಮಾನ್ಯ ಉಪ ಮುಖ್ಯಮಂತ್ರಿಗಳು

ಬೆಂಗಳೂರಿನ 30ಕ್ಕೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಸ್ಥಳಗಳಲ್ಲಿ 350ಕ್ಕೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮಗಳು
(ವಿವರಗಳಿಗೆ ಭೇಟಿ ನೀಡಿ https://blrhubba.in)

ಬೆಂದಕಾಳೂರು ಹಬ್ಬ – 2026

(ದಿನಾಂಕ 16.01.2026 – 25.01.2026)

ಉದ್ಘಾಟನಾ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮ: ದಿನಾಂಕ: 16.01.2026 ಶುಕ್ರವಾರ ಸಂಜೆ 5.30 ಗಂಟೆಗೆ | ಸ್ಥಳ: ವಿಧಾನಸೌಧದ ಭವ್ಯ ಮೆಟ್ಟಿಲುಗಳ ಮುಂಭಾಗ, ವಿಧಾನಸೌಧ ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು

ಸಾಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಕ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮ
ಸಂಗೀತ ಹಾಗೂ ವೈವಿಧ್ಯಮಯ ಕಲೆಗಳ ಪ್ರದರ್ಶನಗಳು, ಸ್ತಬ್ಧ ಚಿತ್ರಗಳು, ವಿವಿಧ ಜಾನಪದ ಕಲಾತಂಡಗಳು, ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಪೂರ್ಣ ಕುಂಭ, ಸಾಂಪ್ರದಾಯಿಕ ಉಡುಗೆ ತೊಟ್ಟ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿ–ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿನಿಯರನ್ನು ಒಳಗೊಂಡ ಮೆರವಣಿಗೆ

ಮೆರವಣಿಗೆಯ ಮಾರ್ಗ
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ಟೆನ್ನಿಸ್ ಮೈದಾನ ➔ ವಿಕ್ಟೋರಿಯಾ ಪ್ರತಿಮೆ ➔ ಅನಿಲ್ ಕುಂಬ್ಳೆ ವೃತ್ತ ➔ ಮಹಾತ್ಮ ಗಾಂಧಿ ರಸ್ತೆ ➔ ಮಹಾತ್ಮ ಗಾಂಧಿ ಮೆಟ್ರೋ ನಿಲ್ದಾಣದ ರಂಗೋಲಿ ಕಲಾ ಕೇಂದ್ರ

ಉದ್ಘಾಟನೆ ಹಾಗೂ ಜನಪದ ಕಲಾತಂಡಗಳ ಮೆರವಣಿಗೆಗೆ ಚಾಲನೆ
ಶ್ರೀ ಸಿದ್ದರಾಮಯ್ಯ
ಸನ್ಮಾನ್ಯ ಮುಖ್ಯಮಂತ್ರಿಗಳು, ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರ

ಘನ ಉಪಸ್ಥಿತಿ
ಶ್ರೀ ಬಸವರಾಜ ಶಿವಲಿಂಗಪ್ಪ ಹೊರಟ್ಟಿ — ಸನ್ಮಾನ್ಯ ಸಭಾಪತಿಗಳು, ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ವಿಧಾನ ಪರಿಷತ್
ಶ್ರೀ ಡಿ.ಕೆ. ಶಿವಕುಮಾರ್ — ಮಾನ್ಯ ಉಪಮುಖ್ಯಮಂತ್ರಿಗಳು, ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರ
ಶ್ರೀ ಯು.ಟಿ. ಖಾದರ್ — ಸನ್ಮಾನ್ಯ ಸಭಾಧ್ಯಕ್ಷರು, ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ವಿಧಾನಸಭೆ

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ಸರ್ವರಿಗೂ ಆದರದ ಸುಸ್ವಾಗತ

ಜೆ. ಮಂಜುನಾಥ್, ಭಾ.ಆ.ಸೇ.
ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಕಾರ್ಯದರ್ಶಿಗಳು, ಕನ್ನಡ ಮತ್ತು ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿ ಇಲಾಖೆ

ಕೆ.ಎಂ. ಗಾಯಿತ್ರಿ, ಭಾ.ಆ.ಸೇ.
ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕರು, ಕನ್ನಡ ಮತ್ತು ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿ ಇಲಾಖೆ

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ನಮ್ಮ ವೈವಿಧ್ಯಮಯ ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿ ಮತ್ತು ಪರಂಪರೆಯನ್ನು ಗೌರವಿಸುವುದು ಮತ್ತು ಕಾಪಾಡುವುದು ಪ್ರತಿಯೊಬ್ಬ ಭಾರತೀಯರ ಸಂವಿಧಾನಬದ್ಧ ಮೂಲಭೂತ ಕರ್ತವ್ಯ.

GOOD TO BE HOME

Crew-11 splashes down on earth in NASA's first ever medevac

CAPE CANAVERAL

An ailing astronaut returned to Earth with three others on Thursday, ending their space station mission more than a month early in NASA's first medical evacuation. A SpaceX guided the capsule named Endeavour, carrying a four-member International Space Station (ISS) crew, to a middle-of-the-night splashdown in the Pacific near San Diego, less than 11 hours after the astronauts, exited the International Space Station.

During a radio transmission to the SpaceX flight control center near Los Angeles, Endeavour's commander, NASA astronaut Zena Cardman, said, "It's good to be home." Fellow US astronaut Mike Fincke, Japanese astronaut Kimiya Yui, and Russian cosmonaut Oleg Platonov joined her on the flight home. Their first stop was a hospital for an overnight stay.

Why was the mission cut short?

The ISS crew made an early emergency return to Earth due to an undisclosed serious medical condition affecting one of the astronauts.

Last week, NASA announced that it had canceled a spacewalk at the last minute due to health concerns involving one of the crew members. On January 8, the agency announced the decision to bring all four Crew-11 members home early. Obviously, we took this action (early return) because it was a saerious medical condition" that required immediate medical attention on the ground," NASA's new administrator Jared Isaacman said after splashdown. "The astronaut in question is fine right now, in good spirits and going through the proper medical checks," he added.

Unexpected finish to a mission

It was an unexpected finish to a mission that began in August and left the orbiting lab with only one American and two Russians on board.

NASA and SpaceX said they would try to move up the launch of a fresh crew of four; liftoff is currently targeted for mid-February.

QUICK READ

Scooter Engulfed in Flames in Byndoor

Udupi

A scooter caught fire due to a technical malfunction while in motion near Areshirooru in Byndoor taluk, Udupi district. The rider, identified as Rekha Poojari, managed to escape unharmed from the sudden blaze. The vehicle was completely gutted, reduced to charred remains by the time the flames were brought under control. Fire brigade personnel from the local station rushed to the spot and successfully doused the fire, averting any further spread or risk to nearby areas. No injuries were reported, and the exact cause of the technical fault is under investigation. Authorities have advised regular vehicle maintenance to prevent such incidents.

Pedestrian Dies After Being Hit by Auto-Rickshaw

Kasaragod

A 58-year-old man died from injuries after being hit by an auto-rickshaw while crossing the road in Punnakunnu, Kasaragod district. Ajayan, a resident of Natakkal Kochangan in Vellarikundu, had just alighted from a bus and was crossing the road when the auto-rickshaw struck him. He suffered severe injuries and was immediately rushed to a private hospital in Kasaragod for treatment. Despite medical efforts, Ajayan succumbed to his injuries. The accident occurred on January 13. Police have registered a case and are investigating the circumstances, including the role of the auto-rickshaw driver.

Assault at Sports Turf Leads to Police Case

Kasaragod

Kasaragod police have registered a case following an assault on two youths at a football turf in Kalanad. The victims are K.M. Appal (27) from Chettunguli Quarters and Hanif (25) from Madhur. The accused named in the FIR include Sadik from Kalanad Keyoor, Andayi, San, Afreed, Tabir, Pacchu, Unais, Ashim, and Mahin. The incident occurred at the turf, prompting immediate police action. Officers have launched an investigation to gather evidence and determine the motive behind the attack. Both victims received medical attention following the assault, and authorities are continuing inquiries to ensure all involved are brought to justice.

Temporary Ban on Trekking Enforced

Karkala

In a bid to prevent forest fires and safeguard the lives of trekkers and tourists, the forest department has temporarily banned trekking in several forest and wildlife areas falling under the Kudremukh Wildlife Division. The prohibition applies to trekking routes within Kudremukh National Park, Someshwara Wildlife Sanctuary and Mookambika Wildlife Sanctuary. An official order has been issued by the Assistant Conservator of Forests, Kudremukh Wildlife Division, Karkala, enforcing the ban from January 14 until further orders. Forest officials said the step was taken as a precautionary measure due to dry conditions and increased vulnerability of forest areas to fire incidents. Trekking activities during this period could pose risks not only to forest resources and wildlife but also to human safety, they said.

Police Step Up Security for Shirooru Paryaya in Udupi on January 17 and 18

UDUPI

The Udupi district police have made elaborate security arrangements to maintain law and order during the Shirooru Paryaya celebrations scheduled to be held on January 17 and 18.

According to the Udupi District Superintendent of Police, police deployment has been significantly strengthened to ensure the peaceful conduct of all religious and cultural programmes taking place at the Sri Krishna Math and across various parts of Udupi city during the Paryaya period.

Taking into account the sensitivity of the district, a comprehensive bandobast has been put in place as a precautionary measure. The deployment includes one Superintendent of Police, one Additional Superintendent of Police, eight Deputy Superintendents of Police, 21 Police Inspectors, 61 Police Sub-Inspectors and 110 Assistant Sub-Inspectors. In addition, 812 police personnel and 200 Home Guards have been assigned to bandobast duties.

The SP said that four units of the Karnataka State Reserve Police (KSRP), 14 District Armed Reserve (DAR) platoons and five anti-sabotage squads have also been deployed to strengthen security arrangements.

For enhanced surveillance around the Sri Krishna Math, CCTV cameras have been installed at 70 locations. Temporary police outposts have been set up near the Math premises to assist the public and respond swiftly to any issues.

As part of emergency preparedness, one Quick Response Team (QRT), six ambulances, six fire tenders, five fire bullet vehicles, 24 public address systems, six police helplines, 12 binoculars, three drone cameras and 300 barricades have been deployed, the SP said in a press release.

The police have appealed to devotees and the general public to cooperate with the security personnel and help ensure the smooth and peaceful conduct of the Paryaya celebrations.

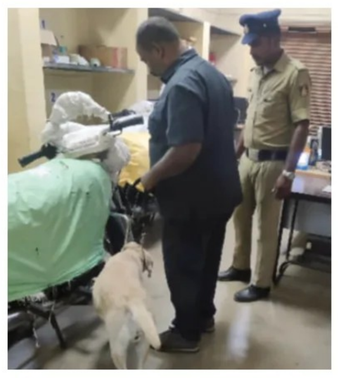
Railway Police Ramp Up Security at Shivamogga Station

SHIVAMOGGA

Karnataka Railway Police have intensified security measures at Shivamogga railway station in view of the Makara Sankranti festival, ensuring the safety of passengers amid the expected surge in travel.

On January 14, 2026, a thorough inspection was conducted at Shivamogga railway station, including the platforms, bike parking, car parking areas, passenger baggage sections, parcel office, and ticket counters. The checks were carried out in coordination with the sniffer dog squad and bomb disposal squad to detect any potential threats and maintain a secure environment for festival travelers.

This action aligns with broader preparations announced by the SP Railways Bengaluru on January 15, 2026. For Makara Sankranti, briefings were held at border railway police stations on January 15, where staff received detailed instructions on duty execution and enhanced security arrangements. These steps aim to protect the large number of passengers traveling during the harvest festival period.



Photos shared by the Karnataka Railway Police show officers conducting on-ground briefings and inspections at various stations, including mentions of coordination involving Shivamogga district police. Additional measures include deploying personnel for patrolling duties on trains and at border stations to prevent crime and ensure smooth passenger movement.

With special trains operating in the region and thousands expected to travel home or for celebrations, these proactive security efforts by the Railway Police highlight their commitment to passenger safety during the festive season.

Authorities urge travelers to remain vigilant, report any suspicious activity, and cooperate with security personnel for a hassle-free journey.

Shivamogga SP Inspects SOCO Office to Enhance Crime Scene Management and Evidence Handling

SHIVAMOGGA

In a proactive move to bolster forensic practices in rural policing, the Superintendent of Police (SP) for Shivamogga District visited the Scene of Crime Officers (SOCO) office on the evening of January 14, 2026. The inspection aimed at reviewing operational protocols, with a strong emphasis on securing crime scenes and meticulously collecting evidence to strengthen investigations.

During the visit, the SP conducted a thorough assessment of the SOCO team's work methods. Key discussions revolved around best practices for preserving crime sites and gathering physical evidence, which are critical for building robust cases in court.

Additionally, the SP provided targeted guidance to local police officers on safely transporting evidence parcels to forensic science laboratories. This support is intended to minimize risks of tampering or loss during transit. Officers received practical advice and suggestions on executing their duties more effectively, while any reported grievances or operational shortcomings were attentively heard and noted for resolution.

This visit comes amid broader efforts by Karnataka Police to modernize forensic operations in rural areas, where resource constraints often challenge efficient crime scene management. Local stakeholders have welcomed such supervisory engagements, viewing them as steps toward more accountable and effective law enforcement.

Udupi Gears Up for Grand Republic Day Celebrations Ahead

UDUPI

District Commissioner Swaroopa T.K. has instructed all departments to make comprehensive arrangements for a dignified and vibrant celebration of the 77th Republic Day on January 26. Presiding over a preliminary meeting held today at the District Commissioner's office conference hall in Rajatadri, Manipal, she outlined the detailed schedule and responsibilities.

The main event will take place at Mahatma Gandhi District Stadium in Ajjarkadu, commencing at 8:30 AM with patriotic songs. From 8:30 to 8:50 AM, homage will be paid to martyrs. At 9 AM, the district in-charge minister will hoist the national flag, receive the guard of honour, and deliver the Republic Day message. A cultural programme by school and college students will follow the official proceedings.

Parades by police, forest department, home guards, NCC, Scouts and Guides, Seva Dal, and students from various institutions will be a key highlight. All participating units must complete rehearsals at least three days in advance.

The DC stressed the need for proper stage setup, separate seating for freedom fighters, dignitaries, officials, and media personnel, adequate public address system, drinking water arrangements, sweet distribution, ambulance standby, and other essential facilities.

Printed invitation cards should be prepared as per protocol and distributed to people's representatives, dignitaries, freedom fighters, and their families to ensure their presence. Various committees have been formed, including welcome, compering, protocol, stage, parade, and cultural programmes. Officers assigned to each must execute their tasks efficiently.

She emphasized that Republic Day symbolizes constitutional values and called for coordinated efforts from all departments to make the district-level event meaningful and flawless. Officers must discharge their responsibilities with utmost discipline to avoid any lapses.

The DC urged all officials, staff, and students from schools and colleges across the district to participate without fail. She also appealed to the public to attend in large numbers and contribute to the success of the celebrations.

Udupi Railway Station Set for Transformation

UDUPI

New lifts for senior citizens, expanded platforms, and advanced facilities among key improvements; double-line track and Vande Bharat extensions also proposed for coastal connectivity.

Udupi is poised for significant railway infrastructure development following approval from the Union Ministry of Railways.

Union Minister for Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw has sanctioned ₹100 crore for upgrading all railway stations across the coastal region.MP Kota Srinivas Poojari, who inaugurated several passenger-friendly facilities at Udupi Railway Station, announced that the first phase—redevelopment of Platform 2 at a cost of ₹2.6 crore—will commence shortly.

He also revealed that ₹105 crore has been earmarked for modernising 10 stations in the current fiscal year. Among the key enhancements are installation of three lifts for senior citizens' convenience, and redevelopment of the Barkur-Mulki railway platform at ₹4.28 crore.

Poojari stressed the urgent need for double-line railway tracks from Mangaluru to Karwar, saying a detailed project report will soon be submitted to the Union Minister. He also proposed extending the Madgaon-Mangaluru Vande Bharat Express to Mumbai and the Bengaluru-Mangaluru train to Karwar, which would greatly benefit coastal travellers. Additionally, efforts are underway to rename Udupi Railway Station as Sri Krishna Railway Station.

The recently inaugurated facilities at Udupi station, built at a cost of ₹2.40 crore, have fulfilled long-standing demands of passengers. Konkan Railway Chairman and Managing Director Santosh Kumar Jha stated that an expanded executive lounge and restaurant will be ready within the next two months.

Under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, Udupi station will undergo comprehensive modernisation at an estimated cost of ₹100 crore, featuring state-of-the-art amenities. Similar high-level platform upgrades are planned at Gokarna and Mulki stations.

The event was attended by MLAs Yashpal A. Suvarna and Gurme Suresh Shetty.

Teacher Found Dead by Suicide Inside Classroom

SHIVAMOGGA

A tragic incident unfolded at the government higher primary school in Baluru village, Shikaripura taluk, Shivamogga district, on Thursday.

Dhananjaya (51), a resident of Jeenahalli village and currently living in Honnali, was found hanging inside his classroom during the afternoon break. He had arrived at school as usual in the morning, completed voter list revision work in the village, and conducted regular classes. After sending the students out during lunch, saying he needed to complete some paperwork, he locked the door and windows from inside.

When he failed to emerge even after a long time and students remained outside, fellow teachers grew suspicious. They knocked on the door but received no response. Peering through the window, they discovered the shocking scene.

Teachers and villagers immediately broke open the door, brought him down, and attempted first aid, but he had already passed away.The exact reason behind the suicide remains unknown. Colleagues noted that he appeared normal when he arrived at school.

Shikaripura rural police visited the spot, conducted an inspection, and registered a case. An investigation is ongoing to determine the circumstances leading to the incident. The event has left students traumatized and cast a pall of sorrow over the village.

Xpheno doubles Udupi CoE capacity, bets big on Silicon Beach talent for GCC hiring

UDUPI

Specialist staffing firm Xpheno has expanded its Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Udupi, doubling capacity within a year of launch, as demand from Global Capability Centres (GCCs) accelerates and non-metro talent hubs gain strategic importance for enterprises.

The Udupi CoE, launched in September 2024 as the region's first recruitment-focused centre, has now been scaled up to a 250-seater facility. The expansion is aimed at strengthening Xpheno's ability to deliver specialist hiring at scale for GCCs and global enterprises across India and select international markets.

"Our Udupi CoE has given us a unique mix of leadership talent, access to trainable freshers and high-quality infrastructure. This has blended well with our vision and culture of excellence, giving us the confidence to scale capacity rapidly," said Anil Kumar Ethanur, Co-founder of Xpheno.

In just over a year of operations, the Udupi centre has supported more than 50 clients, including over 10 GCCs, and delivered 1,050 placements across IT and non-IT roles through direct and contract hiring. While 104 placements were completed in 2024, the number rose sharply to 951 in 2025, reflecting growing enterprise confidence in distributed, non-metro delivery models. The centre currently supports hiring mandates across Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune and Mumbai, while also executing international assignments, including for Dubai.

The expansion aligns with insights from the Silicon Beach Skills Report, released in September 2025 by Xpheno in partnership with the Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM). The report estimates the Udupi–Mangaluru cluster as a 310,000-plus talent pool, with about 240,000 professionals in the accessible active workforce, positioning it as one of Karnataka's most under-leveraged talent corridors.

Nearly 75% of experienced white-collar talent in the region is concentrated in Mangaluru and Udupi, with strengths across IT/ITES, BFSI, programming, finance and accounting. However, only around 90,000 professionals currently have more than a year of experience, underscoring the need for structured skilling and local employment generation—an approach central to Xpheno's CoE model.

"The Udupi CoE is a hub of opportunity powered by home-grown talent. Nearly 80% of our team comes from non-recruitment backgrounds and is systematically upskilled into industry specialists. Over 50% of our workforce here is women," said Kamal KaranthAirody, Co-founder of Xpheno, who hails from the region.

With GCCs increasingly adopting non-metro strategies, Xpheno's expanded Udupi CoE is expected to drive local employment, deepen industry-academia collaboration and strengthen Karnataka's 'Beyond Bengaluru' digital economy vision.

‘Mini Bangladesh’ WhatsApp Post Triggers Police Action in Mangaluru

MANGALURU

Police in Mangaluru have booked two persons after a controversial WhatsApp message warning that the city could turn into “Mini Bangladesh” went viral, sparking concern over communal harmony and public safety.

The message, allegedly posted by a man named Ravindra, referred to a “Bengali Canteen” operating behind the Rao and Rao Circle autorickshaw stand and claimed that several unauthorised shops were functioning in the area. It further alleged that immoral activities took place in the evenings and accused the police department

of inaction. The post urged members of Hindu organisations to share the message widely to “save Mangaluru.”

As the message spread rapidly, police stepped in and registered FIRs against two individuals for circulating content that could incite violence. City Police Commissioner said such messages are dangerous as they may lead to attacks on innocent people.

Referring to a recent assault on an Indian migrant worker in the city, the Commissioner said misinformation and rumours had real consequences. “We have already seen how such posts can trigger violence,” he said.

Police verification found that the family mentioned in the post had legally purchased property in 2014. Officials emphasised that people cannot be branded illegal immigrants merely on the basis of assumptions.

The Commissioner urged citizens to report genuine information regarding suspected illegal immigrants to the police. After proper verification, legal action, including deportation, would be taken in accordance with the law.

He also warned that sharing unverified messages or posts that provoke attacks would invite strict legal action. Arrests in the present case are expected soon.

Authorities reiterated that while illegal stay would be dealt with firmly, any form of assault or vigilantism would be prosecuted under the law.

Padmashree Bhatt Niddodi Chosen for Rani Abbakka Award

MANGALURU

Padmashree Bhat Niddodi, Director of the Aradirali Baduku Aradhana team, has been selected for the Rani Abbakka Award presented by the Javaner Bedra team, marking the 500th birth anniversary celebrations of Chauta Rani Abbakka, the legendary queen and pride of Tulu Nadu.

The award ceremony will be held on January 18 at 3.45 pm, during which Padmashree Bhatt will be honoured with the Chauta Rani Abbakka Prerana Patra.

For the last eight years, Padmashree Bhat has been rendering service to the needy and the ailing by extending monthly assistance through the Aradirali Baduku Aradhana organisation. Her efforts have touched the lives of many families across the region.

She is also the Director of the Voice of Aradhana organisation, through which she has introduced hundreds of multi-talented children to society. The organisation has conducted several State-level children’s fairs at different locations across Karnataka.

Originally a journalist, Padmashree Bhat is now actively engaged in social service. Organisers said her selection for the award recognises her dedication to humanitarian work, child empowerment and cultural service, inspired by the legacy of Rani Abbakka.

‘Nudi Namana’ Tribute Held in Memory of Social Worker Judith Mascarenhas in M’luru

MANGALURU

The ninth death anniversary of noted social worker Judith Mascarenhas was observed with a meaningful tribute programme titled ‘Nudi Namana’, organised by the Central Council of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) recently

The programme began with an introductory address by Titus Noronha. Welcoming the gathering, SSVP Central Council President Jyo Kuvelho set the tone for the event by recalling the selfless service rendered by Judith Mascarenhas. On the occasion, it was announced that a memorial programme would be organised every year on January 9 to honour her life and contributions.

Assistant Photo Editor of The Times of India Ravi Posavanike, Kannada Prabha journalist Krishna Mohan, and Dolfy D’Souza of the Preeti Neeti Trust, who attended as chief guests, shared their personal associations with Judith Mascarenhas and recalled her tireless commitment to social justice.

Speakers remembered her multifaceted service as a teacher, journalist, politician, corporator and former Deputy Mayor of Mangaluru. They praised her relentless efforts towards justice, compassion and the welfare of the marginalised sections of society.

Judith Mascarenhas was remembered as a rare individual who connected effortlessly with people across all sections of society. Known for her discipline, empathy and simplicity, she was fondly called “Judibai” by many. Several speakers described her as the “Mother Teresa of Mangaluru,” recalling how her home was always open to those in distress.

Speaking on the occasion, Dolfy D’Souza and Santosh Sequeira recalled instances where Judith stood firmly by the poor even when influential individuals turned away. A touching anecdote involving her driver highlighted the profound impact of her kindness on those around her.

SSVP member and former corporator Gilbert Pinto, office-bearers of the Central Council, neighbours, and members of the Preeti Neeti Trust were present. Flavi Lobo, Secretary of the Bendoor SSVP Conference, proposed the vote of thanks, while Titus Noronha compered the programme.

Unnatural Death Case of 15-Year-Old Converted into Murder Case: DK Police

BELTHANGADY

The Dakshina Kannada district police have converted the unnatural death case of a 15-year-old boy from Odilnala village in Belthangady taluk into a murder case, following findings in the preliminary post-mortem report, police said.

According to the police, the incident occurred under the jurisdiction of the Belthangady police station and pertains to the death of Sumanth (15), whose body was recovered from a lake. The preliminary post-mortem report, received after the autopsy conducted on January 14, 2026, indicates that the boy was alive at the time he entered the water and that the immediate cause of death was drowning.

The report further states that injuries found on the head were caused by blunt force trauma and were not inflicted by any sharp weapon. However, police said that no clear or satisfactory explanation has emerged so far regarding how the head injuries were sustained.

“In view of the unexplained nature of the head injuries and to ensure a comprehensive and impartial investigation, the unnatural death case has been converted into a murder case,” the Dakshina Kannada district police said in an official statement.

To carry out a thorough and detailed investigation, four special teams have been formed under the leadership of the Belthangady Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP). These teams will probe all possible angles related to the incident, including the circumstances leading to the boy entering the lake and the cause of the injuries.

Police said further investigation is underway and assured that all aspects of the case will be examined carefully to ascertain the truth behind the incident.

Ambedkar Bhavan Hall Inaugurated at Nantoor in Kadri North Ward

MANGALURU

The inauguration of the auditorium at the Dr B.R. Ambedkar Bhavan near the Koragajja temple at Nantoor in Kadri North Ward (Ward No. 32) of the Mangaluru City Corporation limits was held in the presence of MLA Vedavyas Kamath.

Speaking after inaugurating the facility, the MLA said that the former corporator of the ward, Shaqeela Kava, had repeatedly requested the construction of a well-equipped Ambedkar Bhavan for the area. Responding to the demand, funds to the tune of ₹25 lakh were secured during the previous BJP government’s tenure, following which the work was completed in a short span of time.

“I am happy that the auditorium is now ready and has been inaugurated. I hope this Ambedkar Bhavan will be of great use to the people of this locality and serve as a centre for social and community activities,” Kamath said.

He added that the project reflects the commitment to providing essential infrastructure at the grassroots level and ensuring facilities that benefit all sections of society.

Mandal president Ramesh Kandettu, Kamalakshi, Gangadhar Kadri, Naina Vishwanath, Chandrashekar Bajal, Ravichandra, Venkatesh, Dritesh Gundalike, Vijaya Shenoy, Ramesh Mundan, Chandrakant, Shivappa Nantoor, Santosh Nantoor, Chetan Narendra, Uma Kandettu, Uma Shetty, Usha Shetty, Chinnappa, Vithal Gundalike, Shivananda, Chandrakant, Yamunappa, Akhilesh, Yashwanthi, Rohith and Koragajja temple representatives Naveen, Gangadhar and Dayanand, along with several ward leaders, party workers and local residents, were present at the event.

Over 3.39 Lakh Volunteers Take Part in ‘Nammuru Namma Shraddha Kendra’ Cleanliness Drive Across Karnataka

DHARMASTHALA

As part of the ‘Nammuru Namma Shraddha Kendra’ campaign under the Sri Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project (SKDRDP), large-scale cleanliness drives were carried out across Karnataka during the Makara Sankranti period with active public participation.

This year, around 3,39,699 volunteers undertook cleanliness activities at 14,049 religious and public centres across the State, highlighting a strong community-driven commitment towards maintaining hygiene at places of faith and public importance.

The initiative aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and has been actively supported by Dharmasthala Dharmadhikari Dr. D. Veerendra Heggade and Hemavathi V. Heggade. Through their guidance and motivation, awareness was created that maintaining cleanliness at local religious centres is a shared social responsibility. The campaign was carried out with the objective of instilling a sense of ownership under the theme ‘Nammuru Namma Shraddha Kendra’ (Our Village, Our Sacred Centre).

Cleanliness drives are organised annually during Independence Day and Makara Sankranti as part of a week-long programme focusing on religious centres such as temples, basadis, mosques and churches. During the Sankranti period, the Shraddha Kendra Swachhata Saptaha was observed from January 7 to 13.

Providing details, SKDRDP Executive Director Anil Kumar S.S. said that this year’s drive covered 13,282 temples, 33 basadis, 350 mosques and 120 churches, apart from 264 other public places, including schools and anganwadi centres.

He said the initiative has not only improved cleanliness but also strengthened communal harmony and collective responsibility among people across different faiths.

Upgraded Padil Primary Health Centre Inaugurated in Mangaluru

MANGALURU

Development works at the Padil Primary Health Centre (PHC), coming under the Mangaluru City Corporation limits, have been completed and the upgraded facility was inaugurated in the presence of MLA Vedavyas Kamath.

Speaking after the inauguration, the MLA said that a new room and a well-equipped roof structure had been constructed with the assistance of funds from the MLA’s Constituency Development Scheme to ensure better facilities for patients visiting the health centre. He said it was a matter of personal happiness that the facility was inaugurated by Latha Teacher, a local resident and his school-time teacher.

Kamath said the Padil PHC would serve nearly 30,000 to 40,000 people from six wards, including Alape, Kannur, Maroli, Bajal, Shaktinagar and Kulashekara. He also expressed special gratitude to MRPL for responding to requests and providing essential furniture such as tables and chairs for the health centre.

“If the need arises, additional assistance will be extended to further strengthen this health facility in the coming days,” the MLA assured.

However, the MLA strongly criticised the prevailing situation of outsourced healthcare staff and ASHA workers who have allegedly been working day and night without receiving salaries for the past three to four months. Calling the situation deplorable, he questioned how employees could be denied wages despite working sincerely.

Green for DPRs: Mangaluru Bypass, NH-66 Service Roads to Ease Traffic Woes, Chowta Game Changer

MANGALURU

After years of congestion and repeated public demands, major highway projects in Dakshina Kannada are finally moving forward, with the Central government approving the preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for key road developments, including the Mangaluru Bypass and service roads along NH-66.

The projects cover the widening and upgradation of the Surathkal–BC Road highway via Padil and Nanthoor, the construction of service roads from Talapady to Kundapur, and long-term traffic solutions for one of the busiest corridors in coastal Karnataka.

These highways are crucial not only for daily commuters but also for heavy vehicle movement linked to the New Mangalore Port. Traffic congestion, safety risks and lack of service roads have been persistent problems, especially in Nanthoor, Surathkal and BC Road areas.

Dakshina Kannada MP Capt. Brijesh Chowta took up the issue soon after assuming office, holding discussions with officials of the Road Transport Ministry, raising the matter in Parliament and pressing for action during the DISHA committee meeting in Mangaluru. His office also followed up with NHAI officials through formal communications.

With DPR approval now in place, consultants will study road alignment, service roads, grade separators, safety mechanisms and traffic capacity expansion. This step lays the groundwork for final approvals and execution.

Chowta said the projects would provide a permanent solution to traffic congestion, improve port connectivity and enhance road safety. He thanked Union Minister Nitin Gadkari and NHAI officials for approving the DPRs, stating that the projects would significantly strengthen coastal infrastructure and benefit the region’s economic growth.

Landless beneficiaries can apply in any village for house sites: Rajiv Gandhi Housing Corporation- MLA Rai

PUTTUR

In a major relief to landless families, the Karnataka government has issued a circular allowing eligible beneficiaries without house sites to apply for allotment in any village within their Assembly constituency if land is not available in their native village. The order, issued by the Rajiv Gandhi Housing Corporation, is seen as strong support for Puttur MLA Ashok Rai’s initiative to provide house sites to the poor.

Under the new directive, beneficiaries who do not own a house site and meet eligibility criteria can apply in neighbouring villages or any village where government land is available. Earlier, applicants were restricted to seeking allotment only in their native village, even in cases where no land was available, leading to delays and exclusion of many deserving families.

After Ashok Rai was elected as MLA, over 380 acres of land have been identified and reserved across 18 villages under various gram panchayat limits for site distribution. However, in several villages and in parts of the Puttur City Municipal Council limits, government land for housing sites is unavailable. Due to existing rules, beneficiaries from such areas were unable to apply elsewhere.

The MLA recently met officials of the Rajiv Gandhi Housing Corporation in Bengaluru and urged them to relax the norms to allow applications across villages. Acting on this request, the department issued the circular on Wednesday, instructing the Zilla Panchayat Chief Executive Officer and the Puttur Taluk Panchayat Executive Officer to facilitate applications from landless beneficiaries in villages where land is available.

The circular lays down clear conditions. Authorities must first confirm that no land or house sites are available in the beneficiary’s native gram panchayat or urban local body. Beneficiaries must give written consent agreeing to accept a site and reside in another village. The proposal must then be discussed in the gram sabha or urban Ashraya committee and approved through a formal resolution.

It also states that all eligible landless beneficiaries of the gram panchayat or urban local body where land is available must be allotted sites first. Only surplus sites, if any, can be allotted to beneficiaries from other villages.

QUICK READ

Suggi Habba Celebrates Rural Traditions in Bengaluru

BENGALURU

Suggi Habba, a weekend celebration of culture and tradition, will bring rural charm to the city with Suggi Huggi, a two-day festive outing featuring music, performances and activities for all age groups. Organised by the team of Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, the event will showcase food stalls, an Avare Bele Mela, rangoli and drawing contests, and folk dance competitions. Traditional games such as kabaddi, tug-of-war and pot-breaking, along with bullock cart rides, will add to the rural flavour. The programme will be held on January 17 and 18 at Jakkur Grounds.

Office Space Required for Urban Planning Department

BENGALURU

The Bangalore South Municipal Corporation's Deputy Director of Urban Planning and Town Planning, Zone-02, which covers 18 wards including Bommanahalli, BTM Layout, and parts of Mahadevapura Assembly Constituencies, requires a permanent office close to the three constituencies to facilitate public access. The current office at BTM Layout, 4th Phase, 2nd Block, Devarachikkanhalli (opposite RTO Office) has been temporarily relocated to the 2nd Floor, BDA Commercial Complex, 6th Sector, HSR Layout. Citizens visiting the office are requested to cooperate during this temporary arrangement.

Auto Driver Wins Praise from Foreign Tourist

BENGALURU

A foreign tourist in Indiranagar was left impressed by an auto driver's honesty and courtesy during a late-night ride. The driver performed his duties professionally, without harassment or asking for extra money, even in the middle of the night. Most of the fare was gladly accepted without any dispute. A video of the incident, uploaded by the tourist, has since gone viral on social media, earning widespread praise for the driver's integrity and professionalism.

Dalit CM Possible If Cong High Command Decides: KH Muniyappa

Minister KH Muniyappa lamented absence of Dalit Chief Minister, deferring decision to high command

BENGALURU

Minister KH Muniyappa expressed disappointment that Karnataka does not currently have a Dalit Chief Minister but emphasized that the decision rests with the party's high command. "If the high command makes up its mind, everything will happen. Mallikarjun Kharge is in the position to decide what should happen at what time. What else should we talk about?" he said.

Muniyappa highlighted the community's electoral significance, noting that Dalits, who make up 25 percent of the population, contribute around 75 percent of votes to Congress. "We have conveyed this to the high command. Our vision is to come back to power in 2028," he added, indirectly supporting a Dalit Chief Minister.

On Rahul Gandhi's interactions with the current Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister, Muniyappa said the Congress leader called both and discussed matters in Delhi, noting that such decisions are left to the high command. He clarified, "I am not for anyone, I am not against anyone. Both have done well in their respective roles."

He praised the incumbent leadership, saying the Chief Minister "has created history" and contributed significantly to the exploited classes through internal reservation policies. Muniyappa also lauded DK Shivakumar for his organizational work, adding that winning 136 assembly seats was no small feat.

The minister concluded that while the absence of a Dalit CM is a matter of concern, the party's high command has the authority to make the decision at the right time. "The foundation has been laid, the house is being built.

Everything should happen as per the vision and timing of the high command," he said, emphasizing patience and party protocol in leadership matters.

Muniyappa's statements reinforce the Congress leadership's ongoing internal discussions on representation, highlighting both the political significance of the Dalit community and the procedural role of the high command in leadership appointments.

Karnataka to Hold Joint Legislature Session on NREGA Repeal

BENGALURU

The Karnataka government has convened a joint session of the state legislature from January 22 to 31 to exclusively discuss the Centre's decision to repeal the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The session will begin with an address by Governor Thawarchand Gehlot to both Houses of the legislature. The government plans to move a resolution condemning the Centre's newly introduced Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB–G RAM G), which has replaced MGNREGA. Detailed deliberations will precede the tabling of the resolution for passage. Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil said the decision to convene the session was taken at a special Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday.

Patil said the government would take all necessary steps to protect public interest if the federal structure was undermined or if the rights of the people were affected. He added that the objective of the special session was to create public awareness and foster a deeper understanding of the social and economic impact of replacing MGNREGA, which has been a key livelihood support scheme for rural households.

Explaining the rationale behind the extended session, Patil noted that while the government had initially planned a two-day sitting, constitutional provisions required a longer format. Article 176 of the Constitution mandates that the Governor must address the first session of the legislature each year, prompting the government to restructure the session accordingly.

Responding to questions on why other states were not mounting similar opposition, Patil said Punjab and Tamil Nadu had already raised concerns, while at least six other states had expressed dissatisfaction with the Centre's decision. He clarified that Karnataka intended to approach both the "people's court" and the court of law on the issue.

Leader of the Opposition R. Ashoka criticised the move, alleging that the joint session was convened with mala fide intent and amounted to a waste of public money. Legislative sessions, he said, were meant for law-making and governance issues, and a resolution of this nature would have no practical impact.

₹8 Lakh Tax Shock for Driver over Fake Account

BENGALURU

A 26-year-old driver employed with a regional news channel in the city was left stunned after Mysuru GST officials issued him a summons demanding over ₹8 lakh in taxes for transactions he insists he never carried out.

The victim, B.H. Bharath, a resident of Krishnappa Garden in south Bengaluru, approached GST authorities seeking clarification after receiving the notice. Officials informed him that a current account had been opened in his name, recording financial transactions totalling nearly ₹30 lakh.

According to preliminary findings, the account was opened on April 5, 2024, at a bank using Bharath's Aadhaar and PAN details. Investigators found transactions amounting to more than ₹29.5 lakh, of which around ₹8.2 lakh was classified as taxable income, prompting the tax demand.

The GST notice, delivered on December 8, 2025, was sent to Bharath's permanent address in a village in Channarayapatna taluk of Hassan district. The summons stated that substantial UPI-based digital transactions had taken place through the account, allegedly linked to a firm registered in his name.

NEET Mandatory for BPT, BOT Admissions from 2026–2027

BENGALURU

The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) will become mandatory for admissions to Bachelor of Physiotherapy (BPT) and Bachelor of Occupational Therapy (BOT) courses in Karnataka from the 2026–27 academic year. The Karnataka State Allied and Healthcare Council (KSAHC) has issued directions to all public, private and deemed universities in the state to strictly comply with the new requirement. The decision follows a communication from the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP) to the National Testing Agency and the Union Health Ministry. In a circular, KSAHC chairman Prof U.T. Iftikhar Ali Fareed said Vice-Chancellors have been instructed to ensure adherence to the directive. Until now, admissions to BPT and BOT courses were based on Common Entrance Test (CET) ranks or marks obtained in the pre-university examination. According to official data, Karnataka currently has 27 colleges offering occupational therapy courses with a total intake of 655 seats, of which 131 fall under the government quota. Physiotherapy courses are offered in 203 colleges with a combined intake of 8,915 seats.

Indian Army a Role Model for Younger Generation, Says Governor Gehlot

BENGALURU

'The lives of senior soldiers continue to inspire young soldiers and citizens alike'.

The Indian Army stands as a role model for the younger generation, instilling the spirit of putting national interest above personal gains, Governor Thawarchand Gehlot said during the 78th Army Day celebrations at the War Memorial, MEG Centre, Bengaluru.

Addressing the gathering, the Governor emphasised that values such as discipline, punctuality, leadership, and teamwork are essential for today's youth, and the Army exemplifies these qualities in action. Highlighting the guiding philosophy of the Indian Army, he said the motto "Seva Parmo Dharma" forms the cornerstone of every soldier's life, reflecting discipline, loyalty, a strong sense of duty, and leadership.

In a rapidly evolving global and technological environment, the Governor noted, the Army continuously strengthens itself through modern technology, cyber capabilities, space cooperation, and advanced training to tackle increasingly complex security challenges. He commended the creativity and dedication of officers and personnel, noting that such initiatives have led to significant advancements in defence equipment, bolstering the strength and confidence of the armed forces.

Paying tribute to brave soldiers who have made the supreme sacrifice for India's security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, the Governor said, "Our soldiers have sacrificed their today for our tomorrow." He recalled that Army Day commemorates the historic occasion in 1949 when the first Indian Commander-in-Chief assumed office, marking India's complete military sovereignty. Since then, the Army has defended the nation's borders, aided during disasters and crises, participated in peacekeeping missions, and built a legacy of valour, courage, and selfless service.

Major General VT Mathew, AVSM, YSM, General Officer Commanding, Karnataka and Kerala Sub Area, Brigadier Ajay Singh Thakur, and officers and personnel of the armed forces were present at the event.

The Governor also acknowledged the immense contributions of women in the armed forces, stating that they have faced the toughest hardships with dignity, patience, and indomitable courage. "The nation is indebted to our soldiers, ex-servicemen, brave women, and their families for their sacrifice, dedication, courage, and unwavering faith in the nation," he said, extending his heartfelt gratitude and salute.

FESTIVAL BLESSINGS...

On Makara Sankranti, Governor Thawarchand Gehlot performed the traditional Cow Puja, invoking blessings for the health, prosperity, and well-being of Karnataka's people. ➤ CH PHOTO

Chronic Delays Mar Rail Links to Coastal Karnataka, Young Commuters Worst Hit

BENGALURU

Weekend returns, early-morning classes and Monday office hours are increasingly being disrupted for young commuters travelling on the Bengaluru–coastal Karnataka route, with trains to Mangaluru running persistently late over the past few weeks. Delays tend to worsen as services move north beyond Bengaluru, affecting students and working professionals the most.

Data from Indian Railways' National Train Enquiry System (NTES) shows several long-distance trains on the route recording average delays of over 30 minutes. The SMVT–Murdeshwar Express (16585), for instance, logged an average delay of 30 minutes on arrival at Mangaluru Junction over a seven-day period. By the time it reached Mangaluru Central, the delay had stretched to 39 minutes.

A similar trend has been observed on the Yeshwantpur–Karwar Express (16515), a key link between Bengaluru and coastal towns. Over the past week, it arrived at Mangaluru Junction an average of 13 minutes late, with commuters noting that delays often worsen further north after crossing Mangaluru.

"When I last travelled to Mangaluru, my train was delayed by nearly an hour," said Soumilk Choudhury, a frequent traveller. "It was held up for a long stretch at Shrivagilu station. One reason could be the growing number of Vande Bharat services from Bengaluru, which get priority." Rail enthusiasts and daily commuters say students and young professionals are bearing the brunt, given their tighter reporting schedules. R. Kaushik, based in coastal Karnataka, said delays have become routine. "Many young people commute between the coast and Bengaluru for education and work. If delays are unavoidable, the railway should at least revise timetables to help passengers plan better," he said. South Western Railway officials acknowledged operational constraints, particularly in the Western Ghats section. A senior official said adding extra coaches to popular trains has increased line pressure.

Sadhguru Urges People to Learn about India's Natural Resources

BENGALURU

Spiritual leader Sadhguru called upon people to actively educate themselves about India's natural resources, stressing that awareness of soil, water and ecological systems was essential for building a sustainable nation.

Speaking during Makara Sankranti celebrations at the ashram, Sadhguru announced that the consecration of Linga Bhairavi, the Navagraha temples and the Teerthakund would be held from September 28 to October 2 at Sadhguru Sannidhi, Avalagurki, located off the Bengaluru–Chikkaballapur highway. He said the consecration would be an intensive and spiritually significant process.

Home to the Adiyogi statue, Yogeshwar Linga and Naga shrines, Sadhguru Sannidhi has been envisioned as a major spiritual and cultural centre for Karnataka, he said, adding that it would serve as a space for inner wellbeing and ecological awareness.

In his Sankranti message, Sadhguru urged citizens to spend at least two minutes every day learning about soil health, water conservation and other natural resources. "Without this awareness, we cannot build a nation," he said, warning of a bleak future if ecological concerns were ignored.

Referring to India's goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047, Sadhguru said development should not be measured merely in economic terms. "A developed nation does not mean an empty stomach. It means there is adequate and abundant food so that people are nourished, healthy and well," he said.

He also appealed for greater support to local farmers and emphasized the need to protect and nurture farmlands, stating that agriculture and ecology must remain at the heart of India's growth story.

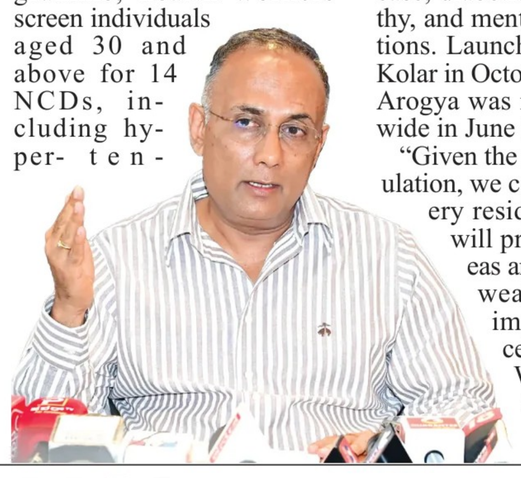
PRIORITY FOR HEALTHY SOCIETY

Door-to-Door Health Screening for EWS in Bengaluru

BENGALURU

The state's door-to-door health screening programme, Gruha Arogya, aimed at diagnosing and managing non-communicable diseases (NCDs), is set to extend its reach to Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) within Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) limits. The scheme, which has already screened around 85 lakh people in rural areas, is targeting 1 crore residents statewide.

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao recently met with GBA officials to finalise implementation strategies for urban areas. Under the programme, health workers screen individuals aged 30 and above for 14 NCDs, including hypertension, diabetes, certain cancers, anaemia, fatty liver disease, diabetic foot, retinopathy, and mental health conditions. Launched as a pilot in Kolar in October 2024, Gruha Arogya was rolled out statewide in June 2025.



"Given the city's large population, we cannot screen every resident. Hence, we will prioritise slum areas and economically weaker sections to improve their access to healthcare. We have traced these pockets," the Minister said.

While ASHAs have been the primary workforce in rural areas, the GBA implementation faces a shortfall of human resources. Rao explained that the health department will collaborate with GBA officials, utilising ASHAs where possible and supplementing with local staff. Referral and follow-up services will be provided through Namma Clinics and select primary health centres within GBA limits, replacing the sub-centres used in rural areas. The programme also ensures treatment continuity. Patients diagnosed with hypertension or diabetes are issued medicines, with over 5 lakh beneficiaries already receiving prescriptions. "Within GBA, all patients screened under the scheme will be provided medicines. This will be a combined effort with GBA staff," the Minister added.

By targeting the EWS population in urban areas, the state aims to bridge healthcare gaps, detect NCDs early, and improve overall community health, making Gruha Arogya a model for preventive care in both rural and urban Karnataka.

QUICK READ

Students Celebrate Makara Sankranti with Traditional Fervour

Molakalmuru

Makara Sankranti celebrations were held in a vibrant and traditional manner at Molakalmuru, with students and teachers coming together to mark the harvest festival with enthusiasm and cultural pride. The celebrations took place at Sarvodaya Public High School and Chaitanya Public High School, where school managements organised special programmes to create awareness among students about Indian festivals, traditions and cultural values. Makara Sankranti, regarded as the harvest festival of farmers, was celebrated not only by the farming community but also by students who actively participated. The schools witnessed a festive atmosphere as children learned the significance of the festival, symbolising gratitude to nature and agricultural abundance.

Makara Sankranti Celebrated with Devotion across Karnataka

Makara Sankranti celebrations swept K'taka as devotees thronged temples, marked harvest traditions, and witnessed rare celestial phenomena statewide

BENGALURU

Makara Sankranti, marking the Sun's transition into Makara Rashi or the Capricorn sign, was celebrated with traditional fervour across Karnataka on Thursday, blending devotion, culture, and agrarian gratitude. Temples across the state witnessed heavy footfall from the early hours, while households observed age-old rituals passed down through generations.

In Bengaluru, thousands of devotees gathered at the historic Gavi Gangadhareshwara Temple in Basavanagudi, drawn by the temple's unique astronomical phenomenon associated with Makara Sankranti. The cave shrine holds special significance on this day as the setting Sun's rays pass precisely through the horns of the stone Nandi and illuminate the Shiva Linga inside the sanctum.

Temple authorities described the rare alignment when the Sun's rays fall directly on the Linga in the afternoon as a powerful symbol of cosmic harmony and divine blessings.

Given the surge in devotees, police and temple authorities put in place elaborate arrangements to regulate queues and ensure smooth darshan. Volunteers assisted elderly worshippers, while barricades and timed entry helped manage the steady flow of pilgrims.

Across Karnataka, devotees offered prayers in neighbourhood temples and observed Sankranti rituals at home. The festival, known locally as Suggi, marks the harvest season and celebrates nature's bounty. Families prepared festive dishes and exchanged 'Ellu-Bella'—a traditional mix of sesame seeds, jaggery, groundnuts, and coconut—symbolising harmony, safety, and good fortune.

In rural parts of the state, farmers celebrated the harvest with special pujas, cattle worship, and community gatherings, expressing gratitude for a good crop and praying for prosperity in the coming season. Cultural programmes, folk performances, and traditional games added colour to the festivities in several districts. Markets across cities and towns saw brisk business, with flowers, jujube fruits, and sugarcane in high demand as essential offerings for pujas. Together, the rituals, harvest customs, and celestial spectacle underscored Makara Sankranti's enduring spiritual and cultural significance in Karnataka.

Young Woman Stabbed to Death on Kolar Outskirts

A young woman was brutally stabbed to death near Kolar following prolonged arguments, triggering swift action by locals

KOLAR

In a shocking incident reported from the outskirts of Kolar on Thursday morning, a youngster allegedly stabbed his lover to death following repeated arguments over the past few days. The incident has sent shockwaves through the local community, raising concerns over rising crimes linked to personal disputes.

The accused has been identified as Chiranjeevi, a resident of Yelaburgi village in Bangarpet taluk. The victim, Sujatha (27), hailed from Dasarahosahalli and was employed at the Narasapura Industrial Estate, where she worked in a private unit.

According to preliminary information, associates and acquaintances of the couple had noticed frequent arguments between them over the last few days. These disagreements reportedly intensified, culminating in the fatal attack on Thursday morning. Police sources said that Sujatha was on her way to work when Chiranjeevi allegedly intercepted her on Bangarpet Road and stabbed her with a knife. She succumbed to her injuries on the spot, before any medical help could be provided.

The incident was witnessed by locals, who immediately intervened and managed to apprehend the accused at the scene. Demonstrating presence of mind, they restrained Chiranjeevi and handed him over to the Kolar Town Police.

Senior police officers rushed to the spot soon after receiving information and cordoned off the area. The body was shifted for post-mortem examination, while a case of murder has been registered. Investigators are questioning the accused to ascertain the exact motive behind the crime and to determine whether there were any prior complaints or threats reported.

Police officials stated that further investigation is underway and additional details will emerge after completing the preliminary inquiry. The incident has once again highlighted the need for timely intervention and counselling in cases of relationship-related disputes, residents said, urging authorities to strengthen awareness and support mechanisms.

The Irrigation Implementation Struggle Committee urged the K'taka gov't not to withdraw its decision on Bhadranadi reservoir control

Committee Urges State to Retain Bhadranadi under VJNL

BHADRANADI

The Irrigation Implementation Struggle Committee has strongly urged the Karnataka government not to retreat from its decision to bring the Bhadranadi reservoir under the jurisdiction of the Vishweshwarayya Jala Nigama Limited (VJNL), stating that the move is crucial for safeguarding the interests of farmers in Central Karnataka's drought-prone regions.

Addressing a press conference at the Press Club Chitradurga on Thursday, committee working president B. A. Lingareddy said the Bhadranadi reservoir currently comes under the Karnataka Neeravari Nigam Limited (KNNL), while the Upper Bhadra Project is being implemented by VJNL. This dual control, he warned, could lead to administrative conflicts in the future, particularly when water allocation for the Upper Bhadra Project becomes critical.

Lingareddy pointed out that disputes may arise between the managing directors of the two corporations, potentially affecting timely water release. To avoid such complications, he said, the Bhadranadi reservoir should be placed entirely under VJNL so that a single managing director oversees its operations, ensuring smoother coordination and equitable water distribution.

He said the committee had already submitted memoranda to D. K. Shivakumar, who also holds the water resources portfolio, and to VJNL Managing Director Sanna Chittayya. The committee also demanded appropriate representation for Chitradurga in the Bhadranadi reservoir coordination committee. Acting on these representations, Shivakumar had initiated steps to transfer the reservoir from KNNL to VJNL.

However, Lingareddy alleged that K. S. Eshwarappa Renukacharya from Davanagere district opposed the move and made statements refusing to allow the transfer, thereby attempting to create discord between farmers of neighbouring districts. The committee strongly condemned such remarks, stating that they could incite unnecessary inter-district conflict.

Explaining the technical aspects, Lingareddy said that under the Upper Bhadra Project, 17.4 TMC of water is allocated from the Tunga Reservoir and 12.5 TMC from the Bhadranadi reservoir, totalling 29.9 TMC. Water is lifted from the Tunga reservoir to the Bhadranadi reservoir and later released into canals, making Bhadranadi a critical component of the project. Single-agency management, he said, would ensure that farmers from Chitradurga, Chikkamagaluru, Jagalur, and Tumakuru districts receive water without disputes.

Controversy Erupts Over Burning of Syringes

TUMAKURU

Serious allegations of negligence and administrative high-handedness have surfaced at the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department office in Tumakuru, the home district of the state Home Minister. The incident has triggered outrage among employees and the public after syringes worth thousands of rupees were allegedly destroyed by setting fire to an old godown, raising questions over accountability and procedural lapses. According to sources, large quantities of syringes stored in the department godown were destroyed by setting fire to the old storage facility. The syringes, packed in large boxes, were reportedly declared "expired" and treated as unusable. However, it has been alleged that many of the syringes were still valid and approved for use during the 2027–2028 period, intensifying suspicions of mismanagement.

Farmers Demands Circle Inspector's Office Be Shifted to Taluk Centre

CHALLAKERE

Leaders of farmers' organisations in Challakere have demanded the immediate shifting of the Taluk Circle Inspector's office to the taluk hobli centre, alleging that a fully constructed police office building has been lying vacant for years despite increasing crime in the region. The building, constructed at a cost of ₹3 crore around five years ago, remains unused, drawing sharp criticism from the farming community.

Speaking before the office of the Deputy Superintendent of Police in the town, Raitha Sangha working president Bedareddyhalli Basavareddy expressed anger over what he described as negligence by the authorities. He said the government had constructed a well-equipped building and provided all necessary facilities for the police station and the Circle Inspector's office. However, due to administrative apathy and arbitrary decision-making, the building has become "completely useless."

Basavareddy alleged that incidents of theft, extortion, and other crimes have been steadily increasing within the taluk hobli limits. "Because the Circle Inspector's office is not functioning from the designated building, policing in rural areas has weakened. Farmers and the general public are living in fear," he said, urging senior police officials to take immediate corrective action.

The farmers' leaders requested the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DySP) to ensure that the Circle Inspector's office is shifted to the taluk hobli centre without further delay, so that police presence can be strengthened and response time to complaints improved.

Raising another key demand, State Raitha Sangha senior vice-president K. P. Bhoothiah called for the establishment of a separate Circle Inspector's office for Parashurampura hobli. He said that if a new office is set up at Jajur village, it would greatly benefit surrounding villages and reduce the need for residents to travel to Challakere even for minor issues.

Bhoothiah noted that local MLAs have already raised the matter with the Home Minister during the Assembly session. He urged the authorities to act swiftly and submit a formal proposal to the government for approval. "Decentralising police administration will help curb crime and restore confidence among villagers," he added.

Two Arrested for Attempting to Sell Ivory Idol Worth ₹20 Lakh

JIGANI

In a significant crackdown on wildlife-related crime, Jigani police have arrested two individuals for allegedly attempting to sell an idol made of elephant ivory near Koppa Gate, within the limits of the Jigani police station. The arrested persons have been identified as Mohammad Shabir (50), a resident of Banashankari in Bengaluru, and Narendra Sharma (45), a native of Sudhamnagar.

According to the police, the accused had arrived at the location with the intention of selling the ivory idol to prospective buyers. Acting on reliable intelligence inputs, the Jigani police swiftly moved into action to prevent the illegal transaction. A special team led by Jigani Police Inspector Manjunath conducted a raid at the identified spot and apprehended both the accused red-handed along with the ivory idol.

Gun of Former Yellapur–Mundgod MLA V.S. Patil Stolen

ANDALAGI

A licensed firearm belonging to former Yellapur–Mundgod MLA V. S. Patil was reportedly stolen after unknown miscreants broke into his farmhouse in Andalagi.

The incident has been reported to the police, who have launched a search to trace the missing weapon and identify those involved.

According to sources, V.S. Patil possessed a valid gun licence for self-defence and had purchased a double-barrel gun for the purpose.

The same firearm has now gone missing. Patil owns around nine acres of agricultural land in Andalagi village of Mundgod, where he currently resides.

Patil reportedly used to keep the gun in the pump house located on his farm. He was last seen using the firearm on the evening of December 31, 2025.

NAME CHANGE

I, **RAJNEESH VISHWAKARMA**, S/o. Kirendra Vishwakarma, resident of. No. 06, Ground Floor, 15th Main, 13th cross, Venkateshwara Layout, Madiwala, Bommanahalli Post, Bangalore - 560068, have changed my name to **RAJNISH VISHWAKARMA**, vide affidavit dated: 14.01.2026, before Notary CHANDRA SHEKAR M, Bangalore

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TEMPLE FESTIVITIES

Makara Sankranti Celebrated at Sri Balanjaneya Swamy Temple

RAMANAGARA

Makara Sankranti, the first Hindu festival of the year, was celebrated with great enthusiasm and traditional fervour in Ramanagara on Thursday. Special prayers and community celebrations were organised at the Sri Balanjaneya Swamy Temple, located opposite the district deputy commissioner's office, drawing a large number of devotees from the town and nearby areas.

On the occasion, special pujas were performed seeking prosperity and well-being for farmers and the public. As part of the festivities, sugarcane, field beans (avarekai), and groundnuts were distributed free of cost to devotees. The initiative aimed at symbolising gratitude towards farmers and celebrating the harvest season, which Makara Sankranti traditionally represents in Karnataka.

The temple premises witnessed the third consecutive year of the groundnut fair organised on the occasion of the festival. The celebrations began with offering naivedya to Lord Anjaneya, followed by the formal launch of the distribution programme. Devotees participated in large numbers, creating a festive and devotional atmosphere at the temple complex.

Former MLA A. Manjunath took part in the special puja and personally distributed sugarcane and groundnuts to devotees. Speaking to reporters, he appreciated the members of the Sri Balanjaneya Swamy Temple Seva Trust for continuously organising free distribution programmes over the last two years with the intention of supporting farmers. He expressed hope that the harvest festival of Sankranti, which symbolises abundance and prosperity, would bring positive change in everyone's lives and ensure the overall prosperity of the state.

Ramanagara Municipal Council President K. Sheshadri also participated in the programme. He said the temple service committee has been consistently organising the distribution of avarekai, groundnuts, and sugarcane every year as part of Sankranti celebrations. He wished that, just as the Sun changes its course on this auspicious day, people's lives too would move towards happiness, peace, and prosperity.

Several dignitaries and local leaders were present on the occasion, including social worker Lakshman, TAPCMS President Doddi Suresh, Ramanagara Development Authority member Praveen, JD(S) leaders Kumar Gooligowda, Mavinasasi Venkatesh, Adishakthihalli Chandrashekhar, members of the temple administration, folk artist Parthasarathi, and temple priest Shivaraju.

QUICK READ

CBI Conducts Searches In Bank Fraud Case

Kolkata

CBI officers on Thursday carried out searches at several locations in Kolkata in connection with a bank fraud case, officials said. The searches took place at a businessman's residence in New Alipore and at premises in New Town and other areas. Five teams were involved in the operation. Officials said the action aims to collect documents and evidence, trace the flow of funds, and identify their end use. Central forces were deployed to prevent any disruption.

Short Circuit Causes Smoke At Mayawati Meet

Lucknow

A brief scare was reported on Thursday during a press conference of BSP president Mayawati at the party headquarters here. Smoke filled the room after a bulb fused, causing a short circuit in the wiring. The incident happened towards the end of the event held on her 70th birthday. BSP leaders said there was no fire or damage. Mayawati and journalists present were safe. She marked the day as Jan Kalyankari Diwas.

Air India Flight Returns After Technical Alert

New Delhi

A Singapore-bound Air India flight carrying about 190 passengers returned to Delhi early Thursday after a technical issue was reported. The Boeing 787-9 aircraft turned back around an hour after takeoff following an APU fire warning. Air India said the crew decided on a precautionary return. The plane landed safely, and passengers were assisted by ground staff. The airline arranged an alternative aircraft to operate the flight and expressed regret for the inconvenience caused.

Kharge Attacks Modi Over Manikarnika Ghat Redevelopment

Kharge alleged temples were demolished earlier and ancient ghats targeted now, erasing heritage, hurting devotees, and Kashi's spiritual soul

NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday strongly criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the redevelopment of Manikarnika Ghat, accusing him of destroying ancient heritage for personal credit.

In a post on social media platform X, Kharge alleged that the Prime Minister was erasing centuries-old religious and cultural landmarks only to place his own nameplate. He said the Manikarnika Ghat, described in the Gupta period and later restored by Ahilyabai Holkar, was being damaged under the excuse of renovation. Kharge claimed that bulldozers were used in the name of beautification and commercialisation, harming

the spiritual value of the sacred site in Varanasi.

Kharge also referred to protests against the demolition drive, where locals alleged damage to a century-old idol of Ahilyabai Holkar. The district administration, however, denied the charge and said artefacts were secured and would be reinstalled after work completion. District Magistrate Satyendra Kumar said the redevelopment aims to improve sanitation and manage space at the ghat, which sees many cremations daily.

The Congress chief said small and large temples were earlier demolished for corridors and now ancient ghats were being targeted. Calling Kashi the world's oldest city, Kharge said it represents spirituality, culture, education, and history admired globally.

Kharge asked if restoration and cleaning could not be done without damaging heritage. He cited the removal of leaders' statues and changes at Jallianwala Bagh as examples of history being erased. He questioned why damaged idols were not kept in a museum and warned that limiting access to ghats would affect devotees. Protests were led by Pal Samaj Samiti, while Congress leader Ajay Rai termed the project an attack on Kashi's soul and Sanatan culture.

Congress Slams Economy Model Ahead Of Budget

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday questioned the government's economic approach, claiming it discourages private investment and presents a misleading picture of growth. The party said headline figures of inflation-adjusted GDP growth appear strong only because price deflators are kept unusually low.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said low deflators reflect weak consumer demand caused by stagnant incomes for most people, except the very rich. He argued that such numbers may help the government project success but hide real economic stress faced by ordinary citizens.

Ramesh pointed out that Indian companies are currently sitting on large cash reserves, enjoying record profits and low debt. However, he said businesses are not investing in expanding factories or creating jobs. Instead, they are focusing on financial markets. He said the upcoming Union Budget must clearly address why private investment remains weak despite strong corporate balance sheets.

The Congress leader claimed that repeated tax cuts have failed to boost demand or investment. According to him, the problem goes beyond budget decisions and lies in the political and economic model followed by the present government.

Congress claims government-backed monopolies, weak demand, and fear among businesses are discouraging private investment and slowing real economic growth

Ramesh criticised what he called the "Hum Do Humaare Do" model of the economy, where a few large companies rise due to government support rather than innovation or competition. He said such a system discourages smaller firms and reduces overall investment growth.

Ramesh alleged that fear and intimidation have weakened business confidence, despite strong corporate finances failing to spur investment. The Congress criticism comes ahead of the February 1 Budget, urging the government to boost demand, restore trust, ensure fair competition, and revive private investment for sustained economic growth.

Six Family Members Burnt Alive In Himachal Village

SHIMLA

A tragic fire on Thursday early morning claimed the lives of six family members in Talagna village, Sirmaur district, Himachal Pradesh. The blaze broke out around 2 a.m. at the residence of Mohan Singh and spread rapidly, leaving little time for the trapped people to escape.

The deceased have been identified as Naresh, his wife Tripta, their relative Kavita, and three children—Sarika, Kritika, and Kritik. Their badly charred bodies were difficult to recognise, police said. The sole survivor, Lokender, Kavita's husband, was rescued in critical condition by villagers and admitted to a hospital in Solan.

Preliminary investigations suggest a short circuit may have triggered the fire, and an LPG cylinder exploded, destroying the house completely. Livestock were also reported to have perished in the blaze. This is the second deadly fire in the state this week; earlier, a massive fire in Arki town, Solan district, claimed ten lives. DNA profiling is underway to confirm the identities of the victims.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) expressed deep sorrow over the tragedy. National President Jagat Prakash Nadda, state President Rajiv Bindal, Leader of Opposition Jairam Thakur, MPs, and former chief ministers conveyed condolences and prayed for the peace of the departed souls. Bindal described the incident as "extremely painful" and offered prayers for the injured survivor.

The BJP urged the district administration to provide full assistance, compensation, and rehabilitation to the affected family, assuring its support in this hour of grief. The incident has shaken the entire state, highlighting the urgent need for fire safety measures in residential areas.

"They aim to eliminate Opposition parties, misusing government power," he said, urging vigilance as the Thackerays contest the crucial BMC polls.

Raj Thackeray Votes, Accuses SEC Of Bias

MUMBAI

MNS president Raj Thackeray on Thursday cast his vote in the Mumbai civic polls, alleging bias by the State Election Commission and claiming government machinery is being misused to secure victory. He voted in the Dadar area, accompanied by his mother Kunda and other family members.

After voting, Thackeray spoke to reporters about the use of Printing Auxiliary Display Units (PADU) in the polls. He said the SEC failed to clarify its use and accused it of extending canvassing time, allegedly allowing ruling parties to distribute money. Thackeray also claimed that the ink mark used to indicate voting can easily be removed with sanitizer, questioning the security of the process.

"They don't want Opposition parties. The entire administration is being run by the government to win polls. This is not healthy for democracy. There is a limit to misuse of power," he said, urging his party workers to remain vigilant against malpractices.

This year, Raj Thackeray and Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray are contesting together in what is seen as their toughest battle yet, aiming to gain control of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the country's richest civic body. The cousins have centred their campaign on the cause of the "Marathi manoos" and promoting Marathi pride, making it a key issue for voters.

Meanwhile, notable voters in Mumbai included cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar, his wife Anjali, daughter Sara, and former Mumbai mayor Kishori Pednekar.

The civic polls are being closely watched as a test of political strength in Maharashtra, with parties raising concerns over electoral fairness and transparency. Both Thackerays have stressed the importance of vigilance among supporters to ensure a free and fair voting process.

ED Terms I-PAC Raid Obstruction As Mobocracy

NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday told the Supreme Court that obstruction faced during its I-PAC raid in West Bengal was "a case where mobocracy replaces democracy." Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the federal anti-money laundering agency, said the ED was prevented from performing its lawful duties through intimidation, disruption, and show of force.

The raids were conducted at the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) office and co-founder Pratik Jain's residence in Kolkata. Mehta alleged that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and senior police officers entered the premises and interfered with the search operations. He claimed that despite prior intimation to local police, state officials seized incriminating material, including digital devices, documents, and even an ED official's mobile phone.

Mehta said such actions not only violated the law but also demoralised investigating officers. Public interference and media statements during the operation, he argued, would discourage officers from performing their duties fearlessly in future. He urged the Supreme Court to intervene and set an example, seeking directions for initiating legal action, including suspension, against the officials involved.

On the other hand, senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing the West Bengal government, questioned the maintainability of the ED's petition, alleging forum shopping. Singhvi argued that the ED had adequate remedies before the Calcutta High Court and that similar prayers were already pending there.

The matter highlights growing tensions between central agencies and state authorities, raising concerns about the autonomy of investigative bodies and their ability to carry out operations without interference. The apex court's decision in this case is being closely watched as it could impact the handling of future raids and the protection of law enforcement officers' rights.

Fadnavis Warns Thackeray Brothers Over Poll Violence

NAGPUR

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday issued a stern warning to Raj and Uddhav Thackeray, saying any attempt to create fear during the municipal elections would face strict police action. The remarks came after a late-night attack on BJP candidate Bhushan Shingane in Nagpur's Ward 11. Fadnavis visited Shingane's residence in Gorewada to check on his health and used the opportunity to send a strong political message to rival parties.

Targeting what he called the "so-called Bhagwa Brigade," associated with Thackeray-led factions, Fadnavis questioned why they selectively appeared at certain areas and not in other sensitive polling booths like Malvani. He warned that any attempts to intimidate voters would be crushed. "They no longer have the capacity to spread terror. If they try, the police will thokun kadhtil. Such tactics will not be tolerated anywhere in Maharashtra," he said.

Fadnavis also accused opposition parties of trying to lower voter turnout under the pretext of identifying bogus voters, saying it is the Election Commission's duty along with polling agents to check for duplicate votes. He assured strict action against those involved in the attack on Shingane.

With Nagpur and other cities going to polls, tensions between the MahaYuti alliance and the Thackeray brothers remain high, prompting increased security across sensitive areas. Earlier, following a report of a duplicate voter at Dadar's Chhabildas School, MNS chief Raj Thackeray appealed to his party workers and Shiv Sena cadres to remain alert during voting.

The developments highlight growing violence and political clashes in the run-up to the Maharashtra civic polls, underscoring the importance of maintaining law and order during the election process.

Omar Abdullah Urges EAM To Ensure J&K Students' Safety

JAMMU

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday spoke with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar about ensuring the safety of students from the union territory currently studying in Iran. On X, Abdullah said the EAM shared his assessment of the situation and the Ministry's plans, assuring that all steps would be taken to safeguard the lives and interests of J&K students and other residents in Iran.

Thousands of students from across India, including many from Kashmir, are stranded in Iran amid a volatile situation, causing deep anxiety among parents. Former Chief Minister and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti also urged the Ministry of External Affairs to intervene and ensure the students' safe return. She tweeted that anguished parents are desperately worried and called for urgent action by the EAM and MEA.

In J&K, the largest number of students abroad are from the Valley, pursuing various courses including MBBS. Additionally, scores of Shia Muslims from Jammu and Kashmir annually visit religious and historical sites in Iran. Reports indicate that dozens of Kashmiri Shia Muslims are currently in Iran, with their families in the Valley praying for their safe return.

Both Abdullah and Mufti's interventions highlight the growing concern in J&K over the safety of its citizens abroad. The government and the MEA are closely monitoring the situation, working to ensure timely and safe evacuation of students and other residents, amid ongoing tensions and unrest in the region. Parents and families continue to anxiously await updates on the welfare of their children and relatives in Iran.

MAGH MELA DIP

Over 36 Lakh Devotees Bathe At Sangam

PRAYAGRAJ

More than 36 lakh devotees took a holy dip at the Sangam and in the Ganga during the ongoing Magh Mela in Prayagraj on Thursday, marking the auspicious festival of Makar Sankranti. Officials said bathing began from midnight and crossed 36 lakh by 10 am. With the auspicious period continuing through the day, authorities expect the number of pilgrims to cross one crore by evening.

Local resident Gauri Ojha said she feels fortunate to bathe at the Sangam every year. She said the day is special because the Sun enters Uttarayan. Ojha added that facilities for women have improved, with changing rooms now available at ghats, though she urged visitors to dispose of clothes responsibly.

Another resident, Preeti, described the experience as extraordinary and praised the arrangements. A lawyer from Hyderabad visiting with family appreciated the cleanliness, facilities, and police presence, saying they came only to offer gratitude.

Priest Ravishankar Mishra explained that Makar Sankranti marks the Sun's northward movement and that worship and Gayatri Mantra chanting during the day are considered highly fruitful.

Divisional Commissioner Soumya Agrawal said the Magh Mela spans 800 hectares across seven sectors. Over 25,000 toilets and 3,500 sanitation workers have been deployed. A tent city has been set up for Kalpvas with yoga and meditation facilities.

Superintendent of Police Neeraj Pandey said over 10,000 police personnel are deployed. Authorities have created 42 temporary parking areas for over one lakh vehicles and constructed multiple ghats with basic amenities, including changing rooms, to ensure pilgrim movement.

QUICK READ

Two Suspected Lawrence Bishnoi Gang Members Arrested

New Delhi

Police arrested two men linked to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang after a shootout in north Delhi on Thursday. One shooter was injured in the leg during the exchange of fire, while a constable narrowly escaped as a bullet hit his vest. The duo is suspected in recent shootings at a gym in outer Delhi and an extortion attack on a businessman in Vinod Nagar. Officers seized two pistols and live bullets; the injured suspect was hospitalized.

Yamato Logistics India Opens Large Haryana Centre

Haryana

Yamato Logistics India has launched a major logistics centre near a key highway in Haryana, boosting transportation between city and suburban areas. The facility, equipped for temperature-controlled storage, will handle electronics and sensitive goods. Daisuke Ito, MD, said the centre will serve as a supply base for India, the Middle East, and Africa, supporting growing OEM and manufacturing industries. Staff undergo 21 days of training emphasizing safety, teamwork, and continuous improvement, reflecting Japanese operational standards.

Assam Rifles Seize Drugs Worth Rs 29.4 Crore

Aizawl

Assam Rifles seized drugs worth Rs 29.4 crore and arrested a peddler in Mizoram on Thursday. Acting on intelligence, troops stopped a suspicious vehicle in Zemabawk, Aizawl, on Wednesday. A search revealed 9.8 kg of methamphetamine hidden in the tyres, detected with a sniffer dog. The seized drugs and vehicle were handed to the Narcotics Control Bureau for investigation. The arrested peddler, Lalrinchhana from Dawrkawn, faces legal action under the NDPS Act.

Om Birla Urges Commonwealth Unity Against Global Threats

PM Modi at 28th CSPOC Says India Champions Priorities and Interests of Global South

NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday called for a "collective responsibility" among Commonwealth countries to address major challenges like misinformation, cybercrime, and social division. Speaking at the 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC), 2026, Birla highlighted rapid technological changes, including the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and social media in parliamentary work. He noted that Indian legislatures are increasingly paperless and digitally connected, setting transparency benchmarks.

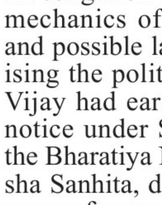
Birla emphasized the ethical use of AI and accountable social media to strengthen

democratic institutions. He said the conference provides a platform for presiding officers to share experiences, best practices, and new initiatives, aiming to develop policies that enhance citizen participation and parliamentary credibility.

Reflecting on India's seven-decade parliamentary journey, Birla spoke of people-focused policies, welfare laws, and a fair electoral system that have strengthened democracy. He stressed the importance of impartiality and fairness of presiding officers and maintaining public trust in legislatures.

The conference, chaired by Birla, brings together 61 Speakers from 42 Commonwealth countries and four semi-autonomous parliaments. Key discussions include AI in Parliament, social media impact, citizen engagement, and the well-being of parliamentary staff. Birla expressed confidence that these deliberations would help Commonwealth nations develop collective solutions to legislative challenges, ensuring stronger democratic institutions globally.

Prime Minister Modi on Thursday said India strongly champions Global South interests worldwide, placing their concerns at the core of the global agenda. Highlighting its G20 leadership, he stressed India's efforts to share innovations, create open-source technology platforms, and ensure inclusive growth. Modi also noted India's robust democracy, empowering women and delivering benefits to all, lifting 25 crore people out of poverty.



Nation Pays Tribute To Indian Army Today

NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar paid heartfelt tribute to the Indian Army on Army Day, honouring the courage, dedication, and sacrifices of soldiers and their families. In a post on X, he said the nation remains in "eternal gratitude" for their selfless service. Army Day, observed annually on 15 January, commemorates the day Lieutenant General K. M. Cariappa became India's first Commander-in-Chief, taking over from the last British commander in 1949.

President Droupadi Murmu also extended warm greetings, calling Army Day a tribute to the bravery, commitment, and supreme sacrifices of India's soldiers. In her message, she praised the army for safeguarding the nation's borders, assisting during natural disasters, and highlighted their gallant performance in Operation Sindoor. She expressed confidence that the Indian Army would continue playing a vital role in nation-building, promoting economic progress, and supporting inclusive development. The President reaffirmed the country's gratitude and wished all ranks continued success, strength, and glory in their service.

On Army Day, leaders including EAM S Jaishankar, President Murmu, and PM Modi honoured the Indian Army for its courage, dedication, and selfless service to the nation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a separate post on X, saluted the army for its unwavering commitment and selfless service. He noted that the soldiers inspire confidence and pride across the nation while performing their duties even under extremely challenging conditions.

Army Day serves as a reminder of the professionalism, bravery, and dedication of India's armed forces. It honours their vital role in protecting the nation, maintaining security, and contributing to national development, reflecting the deep respect and gratitude the country holds for its soldiers and their families.

Mumbai Metro Expansion Faces Delay Ahead Of Republic Day

MUMBAI

Mumbai's metro expansion plans have hit another delay, with only a limited section of Metro Line 9 expected to open on Republic Day instead of multiple corridor launches. Earlier, officials and local legislators had indicated that both Metro Line 2B (Mandale to Diamond Garden) and Metro Line 9 (Dahisar East to Kashigaon) would be inaugurated by December 25, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi likely to flag off the corridors. However, the timelines have now been pushed back.

According to MMRDA officials, Metro Line 2B will require at least another month before public use. Meanwhile, a 4.4 km stretch of Metro Line 9, covering Dahisar East, Pandurangwadi, Miragaon, and Kashigaon stations, has a chance of opening on January 26. In December, the Commissioner of Metro Rail Safety (CMRS) inspected the new corridors and issued compliance requirements. MMRDA confirmed that these have been addressed, with formal safety clearance expected soon.

The state government is likely to proceed with the inauguration once approvals are received. Alongside the metro launch, authorities plan to resume air-conditioned local train services on the Harbour line between Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus and Panvel.

DMK spokesperson TKS Elangovan held TVK chief Vijay Kumar responsible for the deadly Karur stampede incident

DMK Spokesperson Blames Vijay For Karur Stampede Tragedy

CHENNAI

DMK spokesperson TKS Elangovan strongly criticised Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) chief Vijay Kumar, blaming him for the tragic Karur stampede that claimed 41 lives in September 2025. Elangovan said the accident occurred because of Vijay's delayed arrival at the public meeting. "Vijay should understand that these deaths happened only because of his delayed presence. People waited from 9 am to 7:30 pm without food or water, in scorching heat, and many fainted," he said.

Elangovan added that if Vijay had arrived at the promised time of 12 noon, many lives could have been saved. He accused the actor-turned-politician of avoiding responsibility and shifting focus elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Vijay returned to Chennai on Tuesday after being questioned for over seven hours at the CBI headquarters in Delhi regarding the stampede. CBI sources confirmed that he will be summoned for further questioning in the future. The Central Bureau of Investigation took over the case from Tamil Nadu Police in October 2025 following a Supreme Court order, and has been examining the events leading to the disaster, including crowd management and the timeline of the tragedy.

During Vijay's questioning, supporters and fans waited outside the CBI office. The investigation focuses on the mechanics of the stampede and possible lapses in organising the political gathering. Vijay had earlier received a notice under Section 179 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, directing him to appear for questioning.

The Karur stampede, which occurred during a massive political meeting, sparked widespread outrage and continues to draw judicial and legal scrutiny, keeping Vijay at the centre of the investigation.

PM Modi's Tamil Nadu Visit Boosts NDA Pongal Celebrations

CHENNAI

BJP leader Tamilisai Soundararajan expressed delight over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Tamil Nadu during the auspicious Thai Month, calling it significant for the NDA ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections. Speaking to the media, she said the visit on January 23 would help the party chart its election strategy and strengthen its outreach.

Soundararajan welcomed Modi's participation in Pongal festivities, highlighting his appreciation for Tamil culture and traditions. She noted that other central leaders, including the Home Minister, joined the celebrations—a rare occurrence compared to the UPA government era. "Our Prime Minister's visit during Pongal is very special. It marks both cultural respect and political engagement in Tamil Nadu," she said.

Across the state, Pongal was celebrated with traditional fervour. In Thoothukudi, residents decorated homes with colourful kolams and prepared the sweet rice dish, Pongal, in new clay pots as part of rituals. Madurai witnessed a grand Jallikattu event at Avaniyapuram, where 960 bull-tamers participated, showcasing the harvest festival's rich cultural heritage.

At Tamil Nadu Agricultural University in Coimbatore, celebrations honoured natural resources and farm workers. Vice-Chancellor in-charge Dr K. Subrahmaniyan said the 60-year-old tradition recognises the cow's contribution to cultivation and supports ongoing agricultural research. "We celebrate Pongal to express our sincere thanks to the cow and all who support our farming efforts," he added.

Soundararajan's remarks and the widespread celebrations underline the blend of cultural pride and political significance associated with Pongal, highlighting the importance of Modi's visit for the NDA and the people of Tamil Nadu.

Israeli Ambassador Salutes Brave Soldiers Army

NEW DELHI

On the occasion of the 78th Indian Army Day, Israel's Ambassador to India, Reuven Azar, extended greetings and saluted the bravery of Indian soldiers on Thursday. In a post on X, he highlighted the partnership between India and Israel, noting collaboration in counter-terrorism, technology, and innovation. "India and Israel's armed forces will continue working together to develop capabilities to confront security threats. Our cooperation is built on trust, courage, and a shared commitment to safety and stability," he said.

Earlier, several Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Upendra Dwivedi, also conveyed warm wishes to the army ranks, veterans, and their families. PM Modi posted, "Our soldiers stand as a symbol of selfless service, safeguarding the nation under the most challenging conditions. Their sense of duty inspires confidence and gratitude across the country."

The 78th Army Day celebrations are being held in Jaipur, Rajasthan, on Mahal Road, Jagatpura, marking the first time the parade is conducted outside the cantonment area. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Rajasthan Governor Haribhau Bagde, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, Army Chief General Dwivedi, and other dignitaries attended the event.

M'rashtra SEC Warns Legal Action Over Ink Removal

MUMBAI

The Maharashtra State Election Commission (SEC) on Thursday cautioned that removing voting ink after casting ballots constitutes serious electoral misconduct and may invite legal action. The clarification came following allegations that some voters wiped ink from their fingers, raising concerns about election integrity.

The SEC explained that erasing ink does not allow multiple voting, as each voter's participation is digitally recorded immediately. Officials at polling stations have been instructed to remain vigilant and monitor any suspicious activity.

Recalling guidelines issued in November 2011, the Commission highlighted that marker pens used for elections require firm application—three to four strokes over the nail and surrounding skin—to ensure lasting marks. Instructions are also printed on the pens to prevent tampering.

Opposition parties, including Shiv Sena (UBT), Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, and Congress, raised objections, accusing the ruling alliance of attempting manipulation. MNS chief Raj Thackeray alleged that marker pens, unlike traditional indelible ink, made it easier to remove marks with sanitizer and called the elections fraudulent.

Reacting to the controversy, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis defended the process, noting that election conduct is under the Commission's authority. He added that marker pens have been used previously and suggested the Commission could adopt alternative marking methods, including oil-based paints, to ensure transparency if required.

The SEC urged voters to respect democratic values and avoid any attempts to erase ink or interfere with the polling process, reaffirming that safeguards and strict monitoring make repeat voting impossible.

Kerala HC Notices BJP Councillors Over Oath Procedure

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala High Court has issued notices to 20 BJP councillors of the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation regarding the manner in which they took their oaths of office. The bench noted that the councillors reportedly swore in the names of multiple deities instead of "in the name of God" as prescribed under municipal rules.

The division bench questioned how the oath could be administered invoking several gods, when statutory rules require councillors to swear in the name of God or make a solemn affirmation. While criticising the deviation, the court said the validity of the oaths would be determined in its final verdict. However, it rejected interim relief sought by CPI-M councillor S.P. Deepak, which aimed to bar the councillors from participating in meetings or receiving honorarium until the case is resolved.

The petition by Deepak argued that swearing in multiple gods and invoking sacrificial witnesses violated the Kerala Municipality Act and rendered the oath legally invalid. Specific instances were cited: BJP councillor Jaya Rajeev took the oath in the name of Lord Ayyappa, Karamana Ajith recited it in Sanskrit, and former state police chief R. Sreelakha left the dais chanting "Vande Mataram." BJP workers also sang the RSS Gana Geetham inside the council hall, raising decorum concerns.

Notices were issued to councillors including G.S. Ashanath, Chembazhathi Udayan, and R. Sugathan, with the court seeking responses on the alleged violations. The matter will be heard further after replies are filed.

GHEE IRREGULARITIES

VACB Forms SIT To Probe Sabarimala Ghee Irregularities

KOCHI

The Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB) on Thursday constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe alleged financial irregularities in the sale of Adiya Sishtam Ghee at Sabarimala temple. The SIT, headed by SP Mahesh Kumar, comes after Kerala High Court directions earlier this week, following a suo motu case based on a report by the Sabarimala Special Commissioner.

The report alleged criminal misappropriation of proceeds from ghee sales at the temple counters. The High Court observed that certain Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) officials appeared to prioritise personal gain over their duty to the institution and devotees. It highlighted a recurring pattern of negligence and stressed that transparency and accountability are statutory obligations, warning that continued lapses could imply complicity by higher officials.

Preliminary verification by the Vigilance team detected irregularities amounting to Rs 36.24 lakh, including Rs 13 lakh linked to 13,679 packets of Adiya Sishtam Ghee, whose proceeds were allegedly not credited to the Board's account. Sunil Kumar Potti, the official overseeing ghee sales, had been suspended following a preliminary inquiry.

The SIT will now examine financial records, track stock movement, and scrutinise the role of involved officials. The investigation is being closely monitored under court supervision, amid ongoing public concern over financial management and administrative accountability at one of India's most prominent temples.

QUICK READ

Uganda votes in tense election seen as test of Museveni's strength

Kampala

Ugandans cast their ballots on Thursday in a highly charged national election following a bruising campaign marked by sporadic violence, heavy security deployment, and a nationwide internet shutdown. The vote represents a critical political moment for Uganda, with President Yoweri Museveni seeking to extend his grip on power into a fifth decade. Museveni, 81, has ruled Uganda since 1986 and is widely expected to overcome a challenge from opposition candidate Bobi Wine, a popular musician-turned-politician who has galvanized younger voters and urban constituencies. Despite Museveni's entrenched political machinery and control over state institutions.

Iran Protests Unite Exiles Against Clerics

Tehran

Huge protests in Iran have galvanised exiled opponents of the Islamic Republic, energising long-dormant political networks and drawing renewed international attention to dissent against the ruling clerics. However, despite a shared hostility toward the authorities in Tehran, a bitter schism among leading opposition factions dating back decades continues to undermine efforts to present a united front. At the heart of the division is a longstanding rivalry between monarchists who back Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran's last shah, and the more structured leftist organisation Mujahedin-e Khalq, often known as the MEK.

Trump Says Iran Killings Have Stopped

US President Donald Trump claims killings in Iran have halted, while tensions persist over protests and potential military responses.

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump said he had been informed that the killing in Iran has stopped, even as he declined to rule out possible military action against Iran over its violent response to anti-government demonstrations. His remarks come amid heightened international concern following reports from human rights organisations that more than 2,400 people have been killed in a sweeping crackdown by Iranian authorities responding to nationwide protests.

Trump's comments were made against the backdrop of visible security measures taken by Western governments in the region. Both the United States and the United Kingdom reduced the number of

personnel stationed at the Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar. Officials told CBS, a US broadcast partner of the BBC, that the partial American withdrawal was a precautionary move in light of regional instability.

Meanwhile, Iran temporarily shut its airspace to nearly all flights for about five hours overnight, prompting several international airlines to announce flight rerouting to avoid Iranian airspace. In another significant diplomatic step, the UK Foreign Office confirmed that the British embassy in Tehran had been temporarily closed and would continue operations remotely, citing security considerations.

Tensions escalated earlier after Trump warned of very strong action if Iran carried out executions of detained protesters. The warning followed reports that a 26-year-old man, Erfan Soltani, arrested during the peak of demonstrations, had been sentenced to death. His family told BBC Persian that he was due to be executed, though later information from the Norway-based Kurdish human rights group Hengaw suggested the execution had been postponed.

On Thursday, Iranian state media acknowledged Soltani's arrest during protests but denied that a death sentence had been handed down. Speaking from the White House, Trump said his administration had received information on good authority indicating that there was no plan for executions and that the killing of protesters was stopping.

SpaceX Crew Dragon Safely Returns Astronauts to Earth

A SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule safely splashed down off California after an emergency return from orbit.

MARYLAND

A SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule carrying four astronauts safely returned to Earth early Thursday, concluding an emergency mission shortened due to a serious, undisclosed medical condition affecting one of the crew members. The spacecraft splashed down in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of San Diego at approximately 12:45 a.m. Pacific Standard Time (0845 GMT), bringing an end to a tense but successful return from orbit.

The Crew Dragon parachuted into calm seas after completing a descent of more than 10 hours from the International Space Station. The dramatic journey included a precisely timed undocking, a controlled deorbit burn, and a fiery re-entry through Earth's atmosphere, where temperatures around the capsule surged as it endured intense friction. The entire sequence was broadcast live through a joint webcast by NASA and SpaceX, allowing viewers around the world to follow each stage of the operation in real time.

NASA officials said the decision to return the crew ahead of schedule was made after medical teams identified a serious health concern involving one astronaut. While the nature of the condition has not been disclosed, agency representatives stressed that the crew member was stable throughout the journey and that the return was conducted out of an abundance of caution. Recovery teams were stationed in the Pacific and reached the capsule shortly after splashdown to begin standard post-landing procedures and medical evaluations.

The emergency return highlighted the flexibility of the Crew Dragon system, which is designed to support rapid departures from orbit when circumstances demand. Since entering operational service, Crew Dragon has become a central component of NASA's human spaceflight program, regularly ferrying astronauts to and from the space station under the agency's commercial crew initiative.

Following recovery, the astronauts were transported to shore, where medical personnel conducted further assessments before moving the crew to a secure facility. NASA noted that contingency planning for in-orbit medical emergencies is a critical aspect of human spaceflight, particularly as missions become longer and more complex.

Ethiopian police reported seizing ammunition allegedly sent from Eritrea to rebels, intensifying tensions between the two rivals

Ethiopia Accuses Eritrea of Arming Amhara Rebels

ADDIA ABABA

Ethiopian police on Thursday announced the seizure of thousands of rounds of ammunition allegedly smuggled from neighbouring Eritrea to rebel groups operating in Ethiopia's volatile Amhara region, a development that has sharply escalated tensions between the two longtime adversaries. Security officials said the weapons were intercepted during an operation targeting supply networks believed to be supporting armed factions challenging federal authority.

The seizure has reignited fears among regional analysts that deteriorating relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea could spiral into renewed conflict, years after a historic peace agreement formally ended decades of hostility. Experts warn that the alleged transfer of ammunition, if proven, could mark a dangerous turning point, particularly as Ethiopia grapples with internal unrest and fragile security conditions in several regions.

Ethiopian authorities allege that the ammunition originated in Eritrea and was destined for rebel forces in Amhara, where clashes between local fighters and federal forces have intensified in recent months. Police did not disclose further operational details but said investigations were continuing to identify those responsible for organising and financing the shipments.

Officials in Asmara, however, have strongly denied the accusations. Eritrea has repeatedly rejected claims that it interferes in Ethiopian internal affairs, countering that Addis Ababa has pursued hostile policies toward its neighbour. In remarks carried by Eritrean state-run media earlier this week, President Isaias Afwerki accused Ethiopia's ruling party of effectively declaring war against Eritrea, sharply raising the rhetorical temperature between the two governments.

The latest dispute underscores the fragility of the relationship between Addis Ababa and Asmara, which had dramatically improved following the 2018 rapprochement that earned Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed international acclaim. Since then, however, shifting alliances, regional instability, and Ethiopia's internal conflicts have strained ties once again.

US Immigration Officer Shoots Venezuelan Man

MINNEAPOLIS

A U.S. immigration officer shot and wounded a Venezuelan man in north Minneapolis during a targeted traffic stop, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said, escalating tensions over an increasingly controversial federal immigration enforcement operation in Minneapolis. The incident comes amid dramatic resistance to the deployment of heavily armed federal agents in Minnesota's largest city. According to DHS, which oversees U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations in the state, the Venezuelan man who federal officials said was in the United States illegally fled the traffic stop and attempted to escape on foot. During the struggle, the officer and two bystanders became engaged in a physical altercation, with the pair reportedly attacking the agent with a snow shovel and broom handle. Fearing for his safety, the immigration officer fired a shot, striking the Venezuelan in the leg. Both the wounded man and the federal officer were taken to hospital, with authorities describing the injuries as non-life-threatening.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro to Meet Donald Trump

BOGOTA

Colombian President Gustavo Petro announced that he will travel to the United States to meet with his counterpart Donald Trump on February 3, 2026, in a bid to address growing diplomatic strains and discuss Washington's expanded military engagement in Latin America. The announcement comes after months of sharply deteriorated relations between Bogotá and Washington, sparked by a series of controversial actions and rhetoric from both capitals.

Petro's scheduled visit to the U.S. capital follows a bitter year of rhetorical and policy clashes with the Trump administration. Tensions intensified after Washington issued threats of military action against Colombia and due to U.S. military operations in Venezuela aimed at ousting leftist leader Nicolás Maduro, moves that Petro has publicly condemned as violations of regional sovereignty. Analysts say these developments have tested the long-standing security partnership between the two countries, which historically cooperated closely on issues such as counter-narcotics, migration and defence.

Relations between Bogotá and Washington began to sour significantly after Trump assumed his second term in January 2025. In addition to opposing U.S. tactics in neighbouring Venezuela, Petro—Colombia's first left-wing president and a former guerrilla—has resisted key Trump policy goals, including deportations of migrants and U.S. pressure on coca eradication. These disagreements have occasionally escalated into personal attacks and threats, further straining diplomatic ties.

Syrian army tells civilians to evacuate new front with SDF

ALEPPO

The Syrian army is telling civilians to evacuate parts of the rural Aleppo governorate after accusing the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) of building up troops in the area, following days of deadly fighting inside Aleppo city, as concerns rise over a new front in the simmering battle.

A humanitarian zone was expected to remain open on Thursday from 9am local time (6:00 GMT) to 5pm (14:00 GMT), allowing residents to leave Deir Hafer and Maskana in the eastern countryside. The army declared the areas closed military zones and sent in their own reinforcements earlier this week.

According to Police Colonel Sitthiporn Kasi, superintendent at the local district police station, the crane fell onto the road below, directly striking passing vehicles. Another police official told Reuters that at least five other

Crane Collapse in Thailand Kills Two Near Bangkok

SAMUTH SAKHON

A construction crane collapsed in Thailand on Thursday, January 15, 2026, crushing two vehicles and killing two people, police said, in the latest of a series of fatal construction-related accidents that have shaken the country this week. The incident occurred in Samut Sakhon province, just outside the capital Bangkok, where the crane was being used in the construction of an elevated high-

people were injured in the accident and were taken to nearby hospitals for treatment. Emergency responders quickly cordoned off the area as rescue teams worked to clear debris and assist victims.

The deadly incident came just one day after a far more catastrophic crane-related accident in northeastern Thailand. A crane involved in the construction of an elevated high-speed rail project collapsed in Nakhon Ratchasima province, derailing a passenger train. Authorities said 32 people were killed when the train left the tracks following the collapse, while 66 of the 195 passengers on board sustained injuries of varying severity.

SU DO KU

Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?

9			6	1		5		8
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	3			7			4	
8		7	1		2	9		3
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7		6		3	1			5

6	4	7	5	3	8	1	9	2
9	5	3	2	6	1	4	7	8
2	8	1	4	9	7	6	5	3
8	6	5	7	2	9	3	1	4
3	9	4	1	8	5	2	6	7
7	1	2	6	4	3	9	8	5
1	2	8	9	7	4	5	3	6
5	7	6	3	1	2	8	4	9
4	3	9	8	5	6	7	2	1

Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

Fill a 9×9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3×3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9.

CANADA-CHINA RESET

Mark Carney Praises Xi Jinping's Leadership

BEIJING

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney on Thursday strongly endorsed the leadership of Chinese President Xi Jinping, praising both the pace and direction of recent improvements in bilateral relations and declaring that the groundwork had been laid for Canada and China to emerge as strategic partners across multiple sectors.

Carney made the remarks during a high-level meeting in Beijing with Zhao Leji, China's top legislator and a senior figure within the country's political leadership. According to officials familiar with the discussions, the talks focused on

rebuilding trust, expanding economic cooperation, and enhancing dialogue in areas ranging from trade and climate policy to education and technological exchange.

The Canadian prime minister's optimistic tone marked a significant shift from the strained relations that characterised the latter years of his predecessor, Justin Trudeau. Under Trudeau's leadership, ties between Ottawa and Beijing had deteriorated amid diplomatic disputes, trade frictions, and broader geopolitical tensions. In contrast, Carney's government has pursued what officials describe as a pragmatic and results-oriented re-engagement strategy, aimed at stabilising relations while advancing Canada's national interests.

Carney noted that recent months had seen remarkable progress in restoring communication channels and rebuilding confidence between the two countries. He credited President Xi's leadership for creating an environment conducive to renewed cooperation and said both sides now appeared aligned in their desire to deepen engagement. The speed of progress reflects a shared recognition that cooperation, not confrontation, best serves our peoples, Carney was quoted as saying.

Chinese officials, for their part, welcomed Carney's comments and reiterated Beijing's readiness to expand collaboration with Canada on the basis of mutual respect and mutual benefit. Zhao Leji emphasised that China views Canada as an important partner and expressed hope that the relationship could serve as a stabilising force amid global economic uncertainty. Analysts say the renewed diplomatic push could open doors for increased trade, investment, and cooperation on global challenges such as climate change and supply-chain resilience.

'India Must Transition From Uranium to Thorium'

India must shift from uranium to thorium-based nuclear energy to achieve long-term energy independence, said Kakodkar

NEW DELHI

India must fundamentally move towards energy independence, with a strong and accelerated focus on thorium-based nuclear power, said noted nuclear scientist Anil Kakodkar on Thursday. Emphasising the strategic importance of domestic energy resources, Kakodkar said that India can no longer afford long-term dependence on imported fuels, particularly uranium, and must harness thorium, which is available in abundance within the country.

Kakodkar, former chairman and current member of the Atomic Energy Commission, was speaking on the future direction of India's nuclear energy programme. He explained that while uranium was essential to initiate and stabilise the country's civilian nuclear reactors, continued reliance on it is not sustainable. We cannot be permanently dependent. We have to become energy independent. For that, we will have to depend on energy sources of our own soil, he said.

Highlighting India's unique advantage, Kakodkar stressed that thorium reserves position India to lead in next-generation nuclear energy. As far as nuclear is concerned, we have abundant thorium. So, we should very quickly transition from uranium to thorium. And that is the key, he added, underscoring the relevance of India's long-envisioned three-stage nuclear programme.

Kakodkar also spoke about India's self-reliant approach to developing nuclear technology.

He noted that while the country now possesses some of the best reactor systems in the world, performing at high safety and efficiency standards, fuel availability remains the central challenge. All existing reactors depend on uranium, and domestic uranium of the required quality is limited. Although additional reserves have been discovered, they are still insufficient to meet long-term demand.

The situation improved significantly after India entered into civil nuclear cooperation agreements, which opened the door to uranium imports. India subsequently signed fuel supply agreements with countries including the United States, Canada, Kazakhstan, and Australia. These agreements enabled India's reactors to operate at full capacity for the first time in years.

QUICK READ

Tesla sells 225 electric vehicles in India in 2025

Mumbai

US-based Electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer Tesla sold 225 units of its only electric vehicle in India, Model Y SUV, in calendar year 2025, according to industry data. Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) data showed that Tesla retailed 64 units in September, 40 in October, 48 in November and 73 in December. US electric vehicle maker is yet to complete a year of retail deliveries in India as it opened its maiden showroom in July. The company currently offers the Model Y in India as a completely built unit with a rear-wheel-drive (RWD) powertrain.

SEBI may explore regulating unlisted share market

Mumbai

India's market regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), is considering whether it should start regulating the country's unlisted share market, which currently operates largely outside its direct control, chairperson Tuhin Kanta Pandey said on Thursday. Speaking on the sidelines of the Association of Investment Bankers of India's annual convention for 2025–26 here, Pandey said the issue is being discussed with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. SEBI first needs to examine whether it has the legal authority to regulate companies that are not listed on stock exchanges and how far such regulation can extend, he explained.

81 pc Indians optimistic about future, outpacing global peers

New Delhi

India is ranked fourth globally in public confidence, and the country is headed in the right direction, with 81 per cent expressing optimism compared with a 48 per cent global average, a report said on Thursday. The report from SEC Newgate stated that India holds organisations to high standards, with 89 per cent of respondents ranking socially responsible business as highly important versus a global average of 80 per cent. It highlighted a gap between expectation and performance as 89 per cent expected organisations to act responsibly, while only 78 per cent saw visible performance.

Bhutan Advances Clean Energy Drive With New Solar Projects

NEW DELHI

Bhutan on Thursday marked a significant step in its clean energy transition with the groundbreaking ceremony of a grid-integrated and off-grid solar power project at Jigme Namgyel Engineering College in Dewathang. The project includes a 240 kW grid-connected solar installation and a 25 kW off-grid system, reflecting the Himalayan kingdom's broader strategy to diversify its renewable energy mix beyond hydropower.

Welcoming the initiative, the Embassy of India in Thimphu said India was pleased to support Bhutan's clean energy vision and its efforts to expand solar capacity. The embassy noted that the project aligns with long-term bilateral cooperation aimed at strengthening sustainable energy infrastructure in Bhutan.

Earlier this week, a similar groundbreaking ceremony was held for a 200 kW rooftop solar project at the College of Science and Technology in Phuentsholing. Together, the two projects represent concrete steps toward enhancing solar generation in educational institutions while promoting energy awareness and technical capacity among students and faculty.

The solar initiatives are part of a wider framework of cooperation between Bhutan and India. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bhutan on November 11, 2025, the two governments signed a landmark agreement to collaborate on renewable energy development. The agreement was concluded between Bhutan's Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources and India's Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, according to industry publication Saur Energy International.

Describing the agreement as a new and important chapter in bilateral relations, Prime Minister Modi said it would strengthen Bhutan's energy security while drawing on India's growing experience in renewable technologies. He noted that the two countries would work together on solar, wind, biomass, green hydrogen, and energy storage projects, calling the partnership a good and practical beginning for jointly designing and implementing clean energy solutions.

The agreement also comes amid rising interest from Indian private companies in Bhutan's renewable energy sector. Several firms are already investing in hydropower, solar energy, and energy storage projects, reflecting confidence in Bhutan's stable policy environment and rich natural energy potential.

Political Interference Driving Losses in Pak's State-Owned Enterprises

ISLAMABAD

Poor governance, persistent mismanagement, and deep political interference are pushing Pakistan's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) into massive financial losses, after which they are sold off at throwaway prices, according to a critical analysis published by The Express Tribune. The report argues that instead of pursuing timely reforms, successive governments have delayed difficult decisions, allowing problems to compound until privatisation becomes a last-resort measure rather than a strategic policy choice.

The article highlights a recurring pattern across Pakistan's public sector. Despite declining performance, weak accountability, and growing political meddling, SOEs are routinely retained under state control. Professional management is gradually replaced by politically motivated appointments, eroding commercial discipline and normalising inefficiencies. Only when losses balloon and debt becomes unsustainable do authorities opt for privatisation, often

Poor governance and political interference are crippling Pakistan's state-owned enterprises, leading to losses and rushed privatisation.

under pressure from fiscal constraints. By then, the value of these enterprises has been severely diminished.

According to the analysis, this approach effectively socialises losses while privatising gains. Public funds are poured into failing enterprises for years, shielding them from market discipline, only for them to be sold cheaply once their balance sheets collapse. The article describes this as a systemic failure of governance rather than an inevitable outcome of public ownership.

The case of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is cited as a vivid example. Once regarded as a respected regional carrier, PIA steadily declined due to chronic overstaffing, political interference, and the absence of sound business logic. Successive governments treated the airline as a source of patronage rather than a commercial entity, the report said. Billions of rupees were spent to keep PIA afloat even as service quality deteriorated and competitiveness eroded. Its eventual privatisation, the article argued, was not the result of a coherent reform strategy but an admission of prolonged governance failure.

Supporters of privatisation frequently point to Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) as proof that private ownership improves performance. Indeed, PTCL did register operational and technological gains after privatisation, including network modernisation and service expansion. However, the report cautions against using PTCL as a blanket justification for selling off public assets without addressing governance issues first.

Global AI spending projected to reach $2.5 trillion

NEW DELHI

The global spending on AI is forecast to total $2.52 trillion in 2026, a 44 per cent increase year-over-year, according to a report released on Thursday. AI adoption is fundamentally shaped by the readiness of both human capital and organisational processes, not merely by financial investment, said John-David Lovelock, Distinguished VP Analyst at Gartner. Organisations with greater experiential maturity and self-awareness are increasingly prioritising proven outcomes over speculative potential, he added. Building AI foundations alone will drive a 49 per cent increase in spending on AI-optimised servers, representing 17 per cent of total AI spending. AI infrastructure will also add $401 billion in spending as result of technology providers building out AI foundations, said the report. Because AI is in the Trough of Disillusionment throughout 2026, it will most often be sold to enterprises by their incumbent software provider rather than bought as part of a new moonshot project, said Lovelock.

India's merchandise exports rise to $38.51 billion in December

NEW DELHI

India's merchandise exports rose to $38.51 billion in December from $38.13 billion in November despite the uncertainties in the global market triggered by the US tariff turmoil and geopolitical tensions, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce on Thursday. The government data showed December services exports were estimated at $35.50 billion and imports at $17.38 billion, suggesting a services trade surplus of $18.12 billion.

However, merchandise imports rose to $63.55 billion from $62.66 billion, which led to a marginal widening of the merchandise trade deficit to $25.04 billion. Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said that India's overall exports have risen by 4.33 per cent in the first nine months of the current financial year, and total exports for FY26 are set to touch the $850 billion mark.

In addition, India's exports to the US increased 9.8 per cent during April-December of FY26 compared to the same period of the previous year. As part of the strategy to diversify exports, India is forging new trade partnerships with friendly countries, while talks with the US to resolve the tariff deadlock are also ongoing.

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Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal listed the trade talks with the EU in Brussels and the rollout of the Export Promotion Mission in a round-up of major highlights from his Ministry in the last 10 days.

Held a productive dialogue with the European Union Trade and Economic Security Commissioner, Mr Maros Sefcovic, in Brussels. We conducted detailed deliberations on key areas of the proposed India-EU FTA. Also emphasised the strategic importance of concluding a fair, balanced, and ambitious agreement that aligns with their shared values, economic priorities, and commitment to a rules-based trading framework, the minister said.

Chinese factory producing Labubu toys forces workers to sign blank cheques

NEW DELHI

A US-based labour rights group China Labor Watch (CLW) has said that it uncovered evidence of worker exploitation at a factory of Chinese toy company Pop Mart, forcing employees to sign blank cheques and work overtime.

China Labor Watch said in a report that investigators who spent three months at Shunjia Toys factory in Xinfeng county, in south-east China's Jiangxi province, found workers routinely signed blank labour contracts.

The report cited 16- and 17-year-olds being employed without the special protections for young workers required by Chinese law, inadequate health and safety training and other labour rights violations.

The factory supplies Labubus, from the popular the Monsters toy line made by Pop Mart. The 16- to 18-year-old workers at Shunjia had been assigned to standard assembly line positions with no difference in workload or production targets to adult workers, the report said.

The NGO said it interviewed over 50 employees, including three under 18, and that all worked exclusively on Labubus production. The factory employs more than 4,500 people.

The underage workers also generally did not understand the nature of the contracts they signed and had no clear concept of their legal status when asked, CLW's report said.

The group said employees were given unrealistic production targets, with teams of 25 to 30 workers expected to assemble at least 4,000 Labubus figures a day. CLW said workers often logged more than 100 hours of overtime a month, far above the legal monthly limit of 36 hours.

Existing supply-chain oversight mechanisms do not appear sufficient to identify and prevent these labour issues in a timely and effective manner. If Pop Mart is serious about reducing labor risks in the Labubu supply chain, it should establish accessible grievance and communication mechanisms for workers, Li Qiang, the executive director of CLW, was quoted as saying.

However, Pop Mart denied allegations saying it took welfare and safety of workers at our [original equipment manufacturers] factories very seriously.

GOOGLE AI EXPANSION

Google Launches Market Access Programme

MUMBAI

Technology giant Google on Thursday announced the launch of the Google Market Access Programme, a first-of-its-kind initiative aimed at helping Indian startups strengthen their go-to-market strategies and transition faster from local pilot projects to global scale. The announcement was made at the 'Google AI Startups Conclave' in India, where the company reiterated its long-term commitment to nurturing the country's rapidly expanding artificial intelligence startup ecosystem.

The newly introduced programme is specifically designed for AI-first startups that have moved beyond the prototype stage but face difficulties in converting successful pilots into sustained enterprise-level contracts. Google said many startups struggle at what it calls the commercial last mile — the phase where innovation must translate into repeatable, revenue-generating business models.

Through a combination of structured learning modules, global exposure, and direct engagement with senior industry leaders, the Market Access Programme seeks to bridge this gap. Selected startups will receive specialised training in enterprise selling, global pricing strategies, and understanding international buyer behaviour — areas that often determine whether a product can succeed beyond its home market.

A key feature of the initiative is facilitated access to Google's extensive global network of chief information officers (CIOs) and chief executives (CXOs). Participating founders will also benefit from immersion opportunities in major international markets, organised in collaboration with ecosystem partners such as TiE Silicon Valley and Alteus. These partnerships are expected to provide Indian startups with on-the-ground insights into global enterprise demand and procurement processes.

B'desh board rules out T20 World Cup compensation

B'desh board dismisses compensation talk amid uncertainty over T20 Cup

DHAKA

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has firmly ruled out the possibility of compensating players if the national team withdraws from the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup, with finance committee chairman Najmul Islam making it clear that any financial risk would rest with the players and not the board.

Najmul's comments came amid growing speculation that the BCB could face monetary penalties if Bangladesh opts out of the tournament, scheduled to be held in India. Despite reported efforts by the ICC to persuade Bangladesh to participate, the board had earlier conveyed its reluctance to travel, citing security concerns. Addressing the issue, Najmul clarified that the board would not entertain any compensation demands from players in the event of a pull-out. Reacting sharply to a question on whether the squad would be reimbursed, he argued that players are never asked to return money when performances fall short.

"Why should we compensate?" Najmul said. "If they go somewhere and cannot do anything, do we ask for the crores of Taka we spend behind them to be returned? We don't," he added, dismissing the notion as illogical.

Using an analogy to underline the interdependence of players and the board, Najmul said the two could not function independently. "If the board does not exist, will the players exist? They are part and parcel of each other. You cannot think of one without the other," he said, stressing that the BCB was under no obligation to justify its stance on compensation. He further pointed out that the board already invests heavily in players' preparation, contracts and facilities, and opening the door to compensation claims would set an unreasonable precedent.

Compounding the issue for Bangladesh's cricketers is the fact that they have no role in the final decision. Najmul confirmed that players would not be consulted on whether they wish to travel. "This is not the players' decision. A World Cup squad is not formed by asking players," he said, reiterating that such calls rest solely with the board or, where applicable, the government. The remarks come against the backdrop of heightened political tensions and recent developments involving Bangladeshi players in overseas leagues, further fuelling uncertainty over Bangladesh's participation in the marquee event.

Visa delays hit T20 World Cup stars Rashid, Ahmed

NEW DELHI

England's preparations for the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup have suffered an early setback, with senior spinner Adil Rashid and young leg-break bowler Rehan Ahmed facing visa delays ahead of travel to India. The issue raises concerns over their availability for England's pre-tournament warm-up fixtures against Sri Lanka.

The delay means Rashid and Rehan are unlikely to join the rest of the England squad this weekend for the six scheduled warm-up matches. It remains unclear when the duo will receive clearance to travel, though the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) remains cautiously optimistic.

Both players, who are of Pakistani heritage, are the latest to be affected by visa-related complications. Earlier this week, four USA internationals — Ali Khan, Shayan Jahangir, Mohammad Mohsin and Ehsan Adil — also encountered delays while awaiting visas to participate in the tournament.

According to a report in, the ECB has received assurances from the Indian government that there are no objections to the visa applications of Rashid and Rehan. However, with time running short, the board has sought intervention from the UK government to help expedite the process.

Visa delays are not unfamiliar territory for English cricket in India. Two years ago, England spinner Shoaib Bashir missed the opening Test of a series in India after being forced to return to London to complete his visa formalities. The ECB has since grown accustomed to bureaucratic delays, particularly amid strained geopolitical relations between India and Pakistan.

At present, Rashid is in South Africa, representing Paarl Royals in the SA20, while Rehan Ahmed is playing in Australia's Big Bash League. Both players are expected to fly to India directly once their visas are cleared.

Despite the uncertainty, the ECB is confident that Rashid and Rehan will be available in time for the tournament proper. England are scheduled to begin their T20 World Cup campaign against Nepal in Mumbai on February 8.

England also face uncertainty over the venue for their group-stage match against Bangladesh, as administrative tensions persist between the Bangladesh Cricket Board and the ICC over Bangladesh's reluctance to tour India for the World Cup.

Youngsters Hariharan & Arjun seeking high-quality experience, one match at a time

NEW DELHI

Hariharan Amsakarunan and MR Arjun may have only crossed the opening round at the ongoing India Open, but for the young men's doubles combination, the victory meant far more than just a place in the next stage. Making their first appearance together at a Super 750 event, the duo's straight-game win provided belief and momentum in their pursuit of establishing themselves on the elite badminton circuit.

Ranked World No. 54, Hariharan and Arjun produced a composed display to defeat experienced Malaysians Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi — former World No. 6 and World Championships medallists — in just 38 minutes. The result was a statement that the Indian youngsters were not merely making up the numbers at a top-tier tournament.

"We had prepared well for this match," Hariharan said. "We didn't play well in Malaysia last week, so coming here we wanted to give everything. The tactical inputs from our coach really helped."

The partnership itself is relatively new. On the advice of national doubles coach Tan Kim Her, the pair joined forces last year on a trial basis. The results were immediate, with three consecutive titles towards the end of last season, prompting Hariharan to commit fully to the pairing after previously playing with Ruban Kumar.

Now training at the Gopichand Academy, the duo has set clear goals. "It's going well, and we want to break into the top-30 by the end of the season," Hariharan said.

Their on-court chemistry has also been a key factor. "We're both fast movers and communicate well. He understands Tamil, I understand Malayalam — that helps," Hariharan added, highlighting their natural rapport.

Training alongside senior stars Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty has further sharpened their competitive edge. "Sparring with them daily pushes us to improve," he noted.

Hariharan insists the focus remains on learning. "Experience is the key. With more exposure, we'll keep climbing," he said.

Injured Washington Sundar ruled out of NZ T20Is; WC availability in doubt

NEW DELHI

India all-rounder Washington Sundar has been ruled out of the upcoming five-match T20I series against New Zealand due to a side strain, with his availability for the ICC T20 World Cup now under a cloud, according to a report by sources.

Sundar sustained the injury during the opening ODI against New Zealand, when he felt discomfort in the left lower rib area while bowling. Following medical assessment, he was subsequently ruled out of the remainder of the ODI series as well. The five-match T20I series is scheduled to begin on January 21, but the 26-year-old is not expected to recover in time.

Confirming the development, a BCCI official told PTI, "Washington Sundar has been ruled out from the T20 series vs New Zealand due to a side strain."

Despite the injury, Sundar showed remarkable grit in the first ODI by coming out to bat and playing a crucial role in India's successful chase. Partnering KL Rahul, he helped steer the team to victory. Rahul later revealed that he was unaware of Sundar's inability to run freely and praised the all-rounder's courage and commitment during the match-winning stand.

With Sundar unavailable, Ayush Badoni has been drafted into the India squad as his replacement for the ODI series. The call-up marks Badoni's maiden senior international selection, adding a new face to the Indian setup.

India have also been dealt another blow ahead of the T20Is, with Tilak Varma set to miss the first three matches of the series after undergoing testicular surgery in Rajkot.

More significantly, Sundar's injury has raised concerns about his participation in the T20 World Cup, for which he is part of India's provisional squad. Should he fail to regain full fitness in time, selectors are likely to consider alternatives such as R Sai Kishore, Shahbaz Ahmed or Krunal Pandya.

Meanwhile, after losing the series opener, New Zealand bounced back strongly in the second ODI to level the series, setting up an intriguing contest going forward.

India batting coach dismisses rift talk, says seniors shape ODI plans collaboratively

Rohit, Kohli in constant ODI talks with Gambhir, says batting coach Kotak

RAJKOT

India's batting coach Sitanshu Kotak rubbished speculation of a communication gap between senior batters Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli and head coach Gautam Gambhir, asserting that the experienced duo remains closely involved in discussions related to team planning and the ODI roadmap.

Addressing the media, Kotak said that given their vast experience and stature, Rohit and Kohli are proactive contributors when it comes to strategic conversations, particularly with an eye on India's build-up to the ODI World Cup in South Africa. "They discuss with Gautam about the ODI format, about the matches we have, our plans going forward," Kotak said, underlining that such exchanges are routine and constructive.

Kotak added that he often witnesses these discussions firsthand. "Most of the time, I am there and if I am listening, they definitely share their experience and ideas. I always see them talking," he said, while cautioning against drawing conclusions from social media narratives. "You see a lot of things on social media, which I try to avoid," he remarked.

Responding to questions about managing Rohit and Kohli as single-format specialists at a time when ODIs feature less frequently on the international calendar, Kotak stressed that the duo needs little external guidance. "Both of them are so senior and so experienced. They definitely make their own plans," he said.

According to Kotak, preparation and workload management are areas where the two batters are meticulous. "If they feel the need, they go to venues a couple of days in advance and practice. They know what their body needs — not just batting, but fitness and recovery as well," he explained.

Lancers' fourth successive win puts them top of HIL table

RANCHI

Vedanta Kalinga Lancers continued their impressive unbeaten run in the Men's Hero Hockey India League (HIL), edging past Hyderabad Toofans 1-0 to register their fourth consecutive victory at the Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Astro Turf Hockey Stadium. Belgian defender Alexander Hendrickx scored the decisive goal to propel the Lancers to the top of the points table.

The opening quarter saw a closely contested battle, with both sides recording four circle entries apiece. Hyderabad Toofans enjoyed slightly more possession, but it was the Lancers who created the clearer chances on the counter. Liam Henderson came close to breaking the deadlock early on, only to be denied by Hyderabad goalkeeper Jean-Paul Danneberg, ensuring the teams went into the first break level.

Hyderabad increased the intensity in the second quarter, dominating possession and racking up 12 circle entries compared to the Lancers' seven. However, despite their territorial advantage, they struggled to convert pressure into goals. Ironically, the best chance of the half fell to the Lancers, with Henderson's fierce strike crashing against the post. The first half ended goalless, reflecting the fine margins separating the two sides.

The Toofans resumed the second half with similar intent, controlling the tempo and probing for openings. But against the run of play, it was Vedanta Kalinga Lancers who struck first. In the 40th minute, Hendrickx calmly converted a penalty corner with a powerful drag-flick, registering his fifth goal of the season and giving his side a crucial lead.

After going ahead, the Lancers displayed maturity and tactical discipline, dropping into a compact defensive structure while retaining possession when possible. Hyderabad continued to press but found it increasingly difficult to penetrate the Lancers' well-organised defence.

In the final quarter, the Lancers remained resolute at the back and dangerous on the counter-attack, earning more shots and penalty corners than their opponents.

Hyderabad Toofans were unable to register a single attempt on goal in the final fifteen minutes, allowing the Lancers to comfortably see out the contest.

FC Bayern beats Cologne, sets record after smoke halts Bundesliga clash

Bayern Munich overcome smoky delay to seal Cologne win and halfway-season record

COLOGNE

Bayern Munich brushed aside an early disruption caused by flare smoke to secure a 3-1 victory over Cologne, matching and surpassing a Bundesliga points record at the halfway stage of the season.

The match was delayed for around 10 minutes in the fourth minute after thick smoke from Cologne supporters' pre-match pyrotechnics drifted across the pitch, forcing the referee to halt play. Once visibility improved, Bayern gradually asserted control, though not with the same dominance seen in their 8-1 demolition of Wolfsburg last weekend.

Teenager Lennart Karl, enjoying a breakout campaign, scored his fourth Bundesliga goal of the season to help Bayern seal the win. With 17 of 34 matches played, Bayern reached 47 points, equalling the previous halfway mark set by Pep Guardiola's side in 2013–14, but surpassing it on goal difference, boasting a remarkable +53 compared to +35. The victory also restored Bayern's commanding 11-point lead over second-placed Borussia Dortmund.

Cologne showed early intent, with Manuel Neuer making a sharp save to deny 19-year-old Said El Mala inside the opening two minutes.

The hosts were rewarded in the 41st minute when Linton Maina dispossessed Serge Gnabry deep in Bayern territory and raced clear to score a stunning solo goal.

Bayern responded swiftly, Gnabry atoning for his error with a clever finish from a tight angle just minutes later. After struggling to break down Cologne's defence for much of the second half, Bayern finally went ahead in the 71st minute through Kim Min-jae, who headed in from an intricate short-corner routine. Karl wrapped up the points in the 84th minute with a composed first-time finish from a Luis Díaz assist.

Elsewhere, RB Leipzig marked their return to action in 2026 with a 2-0 win over Freiburg through set-piece headers from Willi Orban and Romulo, while Hoffenheim boosted their Champions League hopes with a 5-1 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach. Wolfsburg, meanwhile, rebounded from their heavy Bayern defeat by edging St. Pauli 2-1.

Second-division Albacete stun Real Madrid, spoiling Álvaro Arbeloa's first match in charge

Real Madrid ousted by Albacete in Arbeloa debut

ALBACETE

Álvaro Arbeloa's reign as Real Madrid coach began in dramatic fashion, but not the way the club's supporters would have hoped, as the Spanish giants were knocked out of the Copa del Rey following a shock 3-2 defeat to second-division side Albacete in the round of 16.

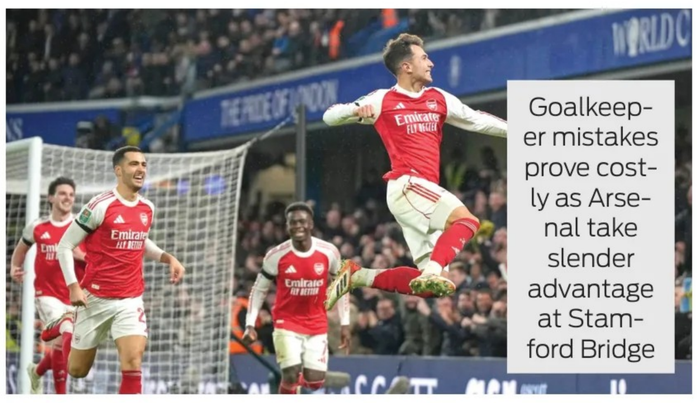
Jefté Betancor struck the decisive goal four minutes into stoppage time, sending the home crowd into raptures and Albacete into the quarterfinals. Moments earlier, Madrid had appeared to have rescued the contest when Gonzalo García scored in added time to level the match at 2-2.

Madrid struggled from the outset in Arbeloa's first game in charge after replacing Xabi Alonso, whose eight-month tenure ended earlier this week. The former B-team coach rotated heavily, handing opportunities to several reserve players and resting key stars such as Kylian Mbappé, Jude Bellingham, Thibaut Courtois and Rodrygo. Vinícius Júnior started but was largely ineffective as Madrid found it difficult to create clear chances.

Albacete took the lead in the 42nd minute through Javier Villar's header from a corner, before Franco Mastantuono equalised for Madrid in first-half stoppage time. The hosts regained the advantage in the 82nd minute when Betancor capitalised on a defensive lapse to score from inside the area. Although Madrid drew level again late on, Betancor had the final say with his stoppage-time winner. "At this club, even a draw feels like a tragedy, imagine a defeat like this," Arbeloa said, taking full responsibility for the loss. "The decisions were mine."

Veteran Dani Carvajal apologised to fans, admitting the team was "not in our best moment." Albacete, who sit 17th in the second division and had not won in five matches, celebrated a historic victory.

Madrid, meanwhile, will look to regroup quickly as they host Levante in La Liga on Saturday, with pressure already mounting on Arbeloa in the early days of his tenure.



Goalkeeper mistakes prove costly as Arsenal take slender advantage at Stamford Bridge

Arsenal punish Sanchez errors to beat Chelsea 3-2 in League Cup semis

LONDON

Arsenal capitalised on two costly errors by Chelsea goalkeeper Robert Sanchez to claim a 3-2 victory in the first leg of the English League Cup semifinals at Stamford Bridge, putting Mikel Arteta's side in a strong position to reach the final.

The visitors struck early when a corner swung in by Declan Rice sailed over Sanchez in the seventh minute, allowing Ben White to head into an unguarded net. Arsenal doubled their advantage shortly after halftime when Sanchez failed to hold a low cross, gifting Viktor Gyokeres a simple tap-in for his second goal since November.

Chelsea responded through substitute Alejandro Garnacho, who pulled one back with a composed finish. However, Arsenal quickly restored their two-goal cushion as Martin Zubimendi slotted home in the 70th minute after sustained pressure.

Garnacho struck again in the 83rd minute to give Chelsea renewed hope heading into the second leg, scheduled for February 3 at the Emirates Stadium. Despite the late goal, Arsenal remain favourites to advance to the final at Wembley on March 22, particularly given their strong domestic and European form this season. Chelsea's new coach Liam Rosenior, overseeing his first home match since taking charge last week, refused to single out Sanchez for criticism. "When my players make mistakes, I'm accountable. That's on me," Rosenior said. "My job is to help them, not to blame them." Arsenal, who lead the Premier League by six points and top their Champions League group, once again underlined their threat from set pieces.

Ofner's Premature Celebration Costs Him Aus Open Spot in Epic Collapse

MELBOURNE

Sebastian Ofner endured one of the most painful defeats of his career after a premature celebration proved costly in a dramatic Australian Open qualifying collapse against American youngster Nishesh Basavareddy.

The Austrian appeared firmly on course for a place in the next round when he raced to a commanding 6-1 lead in the deciding-set super tiebreak against the 20-year-old Basavareddy. Moments later, Ofner won another point to move 7-1 ahead and, believing the contest was over, began celebrating and walked toward the net.

However, the moment quickly turned into embarrassment. Unlike standard tiebreaks that are decided at seven points, final-set tiebreaks in Grand Slam qualifiers require a player to reach 10 points. Ofner's mistake became evident almost instantly, his realisation written across his face as he sheepishly returned to the baseline.

The lapse proved to be a turning point. Energised by his opponent's error, Basavareddy seized the momentum and mounted a remarkable comeback. The American won eight of the next nine points, turning the match on its head before clinching a stunning 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (13-11) victory to seal his place in the next round.

Basavareddy celebrated the win with a pointed gesture, briefly placing his hands around his neck in a 'choking' motion before raising his fist in triumph. Ofner, meanwhile, could only shake hands at the net, visibly deflated as he reflected on what might have been a straightforward qualification.

The victory marked another significant milestone for Basavareddy, who had already made headlines last year after earning a wildcard entry into the Australian Open main draw. On that occasion, he impressed by taking the opening set off 10-time champion Novak Djokovic before eventually bowing out.

For Ofner, the match will serve as a harsh reminder of the importance of knowing the rules — and playing to the very last point — on tennis's biggest stages.

Sabalenka Faces Testing Path in Aus Open Draw

MELBOURNE

World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka's pursuit of a third Australian Open title in four years promises to be anything but straightforward after a challenging draw set up potential clashes with her biggest rivals.

The 27-year-old Belarusian, champion in Melbourne in 2023 and 2024, is on a semifinal collision course with third seed Coco Gauff, but her route to the last four is packed with danger. Sabalenka could face 2021 US Open champion Emma Raducanu, big-hitting 14th seed Clara Tauson and seventh seed Jasmine Paolini, a two-time Grand Slam finalist, before reaching that stage.

Gauff, who lifted her second major title at Roland Garros last year, has her own hurdles. The American could meet eighth seed Mirra Andreeva in the quarterfinals, with the 18-year-old Russian continuing her rapid rise on the tour.

Defending champion Madison Keys also finds herself in a tough section. Keys, who claimed her maiden Grand Slam title in Melbourne last year by defeating Sabalenka, could face Canadian 22nd seed Leylah Fernandez in the third round. A potential fourth-round showdown with compatriot Jessica Pegula may follow.

World No. 2 Iga Swiatek's bid to complete a career Grand Slam appears equally treacherous. The Pole could meet fifth seed Elena Rybakina in the quarterfinals, with the Kazakh having gone unbeaten at the WTA Finals in November. A semifinal clash with fourth seed Amanda Anisimova is also possible.

Anisimova herself may face Pegula in the quarterfinals, though she would first need to navigate a likely fourth-round test against Keys. Andreeva, despite back-to-back fourth-round appearances in Melbourne, opens against former world No. 17 Donna Vekic.

Veteran star Venus Williams, now 45, headlines the early rounds. The seven-time major champion opens against Serbia's Olga Danilovic and is set to become the oldest woman to compete in an Australian Open main draw, surpassing Kimiko Date's record.

With depth across the field and multiple blockbuster matchups looming, the women's draw sets the stage for a compelling Australian Open.

Bono's heroics send hosts Morocco into Africa Cup of Nations final

Morocco beats Nigeria on penalties to reach AFCON final against Senegal

RABAT

Youssef El-Nesyri converted the decisive penalty and goalkeeper Yassine "Bono" Bounou saved two spot-kicks as host nation Morocco edged past Nigeria 4-2 on penalties to reach the Africa Cup of Nations final.

The semifinal finished 0-0 after extra time in front of a raucous crowd of 65,458 at Rabat's Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium, with Bono emerging as the hero after Nigeria goalkeeper Stanley Nwabali had also saved one effort in the shootout.

"We played with 12 players," Morocco coach Walid Regragui said, crediting the home support that whistled relentlessly whenever Nigeria were in possession. A small contingent of green-clad Nigerian fans struggled to be heard amid the din.

The result sets up a final clash on Sunday at the same venue against defending champions Senegal, who beat Egypt 1-0 in the other semifinal in Tangier. Morocco are chasing their first continental title since their only triumph in 1976, and demand for tickets to the decider is expected to be intense.

Reports ahead of the semifinal suggested tickets with a face value of 300–500 dirhams were being resold illegally for as much as 7,000 dirhams, underlining the feverish atmosphere surrounding the hosts' campaign.

Morocco created the better chances in open play, with Semi Ajayi producing a crucial block to deny Ismael Saibari early on, while Brahim Díaz and Achraf Hakimi both went close. Ayoub El Kaabi also tested the Nigerian defence as the Atlas Lions finished with 16 shots, five on target.

Nigeria, who had scored 14 goals in the tournament before the semifinal, managed just one shot on target — Ademola Lookman's effort straight at Bono — and were largely on the back foot. "They had two shots and hit the target once. That tells you something," Regragui said.

Ajax fans may see another Ibrahimovic star

AMSTERDAM

Maximilian Ibrahimovic, the 19-year-old son of Swedish football icon Zlatan Ibrahimovic, has taken another step in his professional journey by joining Ajax on loan from AC Milan, giving fans in Amsterdam a glimpse of a familiar surname returning to the club.

The young winger completes a move between two clubs that defined his father's glittering career. Zlatan played for Ajax from 2001 to 2005, where he rose to prominence before becoming one of world football's most recognizable figures. Now, two decades later, his son is set to develop at the same Dutch powerhouse.

"It's cool that he also played for Ajax," Maximilian said after the move was confirmed on Wednesday. "I am happy that I have the opportunity to play here also and to develop. I want to write my own story. I am my own person, my own player."

Italian media reported that Ajax paid AC Milan around €3.5 million ($4 million) for the loan deal until the end of the season, with an option to make the transfer permanent.

Ajax director of football Marijn Beuker welcomed the signing, praising Ibrahimovic's attributes. "He is a talented forward with a good sense of positioning around the penalty area and strong goal-oriented finishing," Beuker said, adding that the teenager also stands out for his dribbling ability, mentality and work ethic.

Maximilian has progressed through Milan's youth system but has yet to make a senior appearance. He was, however, part of the squad that traveled to Saudi Arabia for the Italian Super Cup last month. This season, he has scored five goals in 16 matches for Milan Futuro.

Ajax plan to ease him into the setup, with most minutes expected to come with Ajax's under-23 side, while regularly training and featuring with the first team.

Allu Arjun's Pushpa 3 Pre-Production Set To Begin

Allu Arjun's highly awaited 'Pushpa 3: The Rampage' is reportedly entering its pre-production phase in Hyderabad. While the script development and story discussions are underway, the film's release is expected in 2028 due to the busy schedules of both Arjun and director Sukumar, who have other projects to complete first.

According to reports, an exclusive office has been leased in Hyderabad where the team will focus on story and screenplay development before moving to actual shooting. The film is not yet being filmed, but early work is progressing carefully to ensure quality. The story is expected to continue Pushpa Raj's journey as he fights to reclaim his red sandalwood empire.

Both Sukumar and Allu Arjun are currently engaged with other projects. Sukumar is working on a film with Ram Charan, tentatively titled 'RC17', while Arjun has three films lined up before reprising his role as Pushpa Raj.

Despite the long wait, fans are excited for the next chapter of the franchise after the massive success of Pushpa 2. Allu Arjun's upcoming lineup includes a sci-fi film directed by Atlee, co-starring Deepika Padukone, and a project with Trivikram Srinivas.

He also recently announced a collaboration with Lokesh Kanagaraj, titled AA23xLK7, with music by Anirudh Ravichander.

With careful planning and a strong team, 'Pushpa 3: The Rampage' promises to be an eagerly awaited spectacle for fans worldwide.

Early pre-production has set the stage for another blockbuster chapter in the franchise.

DHANUSH'S 54th Film 'Kara' Poster Creates Buzz

Dhanush's much-awaited 54th film, formerly known as 'D54', has been officially titled 'Kara'. The makers released a gripping first-look poster on the occasion of Pongal, showing Dhanush in a powerful, intense avatar. The poster's tagline reads, Sometimes staying dangerous is the only way to stay alive, hinting at a dark and suspenseful story. Directed by Vignesh Raja, known for his critically acclaimed thriller 'Por Thozhil', 'Kara' promises an emotionally rooted suspense thriller. GV Prakash Kumar has composed the music, while cinematography is by Theni Easwar and editing by Srijith Sarang. The strong team adds to the expectations of an engaging film experience. The shoot for 'Kara' began in July 2025 and is now nearing completion, with post-production set to start soon. The makers have confirmed a February 2026 release, creating high anticipation among fans.

Social media responses to the poster have been overwhelmingly positive, with fans praising Dhanush's intense look and fiery presence. Many feel the film will reveal a new side of the star, and some called it an absolute fire teaser.

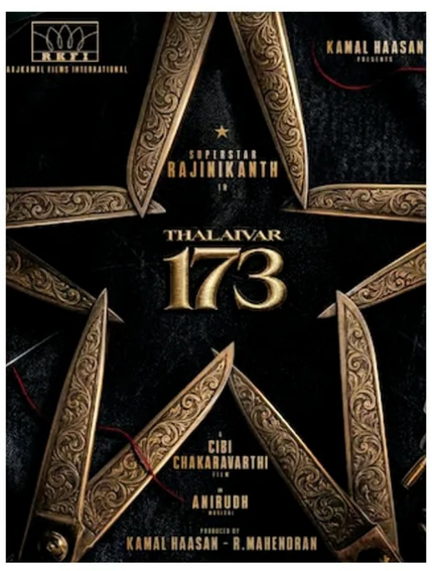
ASHUTOSH RANA Shines In Hilarious One Two Cha Cha Chaa

The new comedy entertainer 'One Two Cha Cha Chaa' has hit the screens, promising non-stop laughter and chaos. Directed by Rajnish Thakur and Abhishek Raj Khemka, the film delivers a fresh and quirky story with engaging screenplay and crisp dialogues that keep audiences hooked till the end.

Ashutosh Rana plays Chachaa in a commanding and hilarious performance, easily the film's highlight. His presence drives the story, adding energy to every scene. The comedy intensifies when Lalit Prabhakar, Harsh Mayar, and Anant Vijay Joshi join Chachaa on a road trip, resulting in naturally funny situations and chaotic sequences that entertain throughout.

The pre-interval segment marks the entry of Mukesh Tiwari as a cop and Abhimanyu Singh as mafia boss Bhoora, bringing thrilling twists that raise the stakes. Nyrraa M Banerji's second-half entry complements the narrative, adding more layers to the comedy. The film's humor is reminiscent of Priyadarshan's cult hits like Hera Pheri and Indra Kumar's Dhamaal, combining situational comedy with action and drama. Technically, the film is polished. Amol Gole's cinematography captures the lively tone, Ranjit Bahadur's sharp editing keeps the pace brisk, and Harshvardhan Rameshwar's background score enhances both comedy and tension effectively. Made on a strong budget under Pellucidar Productions, the climax delivers grand, chaotic fun, reminiscent of classic comedy franchises.

In short, 'One Two Cha Cha Chaa' is a riotous entertainer anchored by Ashutosh Rana's brilliant performance.



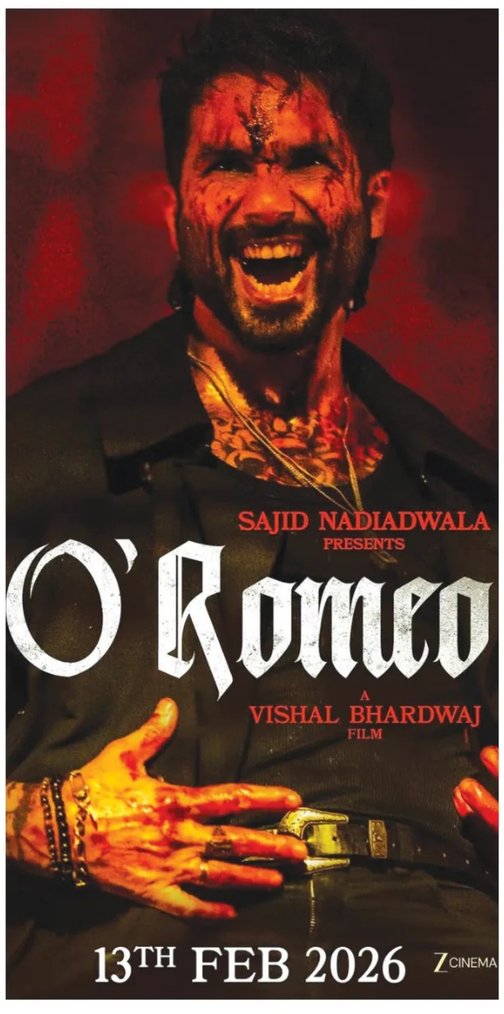
Rajinikanth's Thalaivar173 Shooting Scheduled To Begin April

Superstar Rajinikanth greeted fans outside his residence on Pongal and revealed that shooting for his eagerly awaited film, Thalaivar173, will begin in April 2026. The film is being produced by Kamal Haasan's Raaj Kamal Films International (RKFI) and directed by Cibi Chakravarthy, promising a proper commercial entertainer, according to the superstar.

Rajinikanth wished everyone a happy Pongal, saying, The farmers are the backbone of this country. Only if they are happy will everyone else be happy. Fans had gathered in large numbers to meet him, and the actor waved to them warmly before speaking to the media.

Initially, acclaimed director Sundar C was attached to the project, which was described as a magnum opus. However, he stepped down due to unforeseen circumstances, sharing a heartfelt note with fans apologizing for the change. Sundar C expressed gratitude toward Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan and promised to continue creating entertainment for his audience despite stepping away from the project.

O'Romeo Trailer Launch Cancelled Following Legal Notice



The trailer launch of Shahid Kapoor's upcoming film 'O'Romeo' has been cancelled amid a legal dispute, following a complaint by Sanober Shaikh, daughter of Hussain Ustara. She alleges that the film misrepresents her father and has demanded Rs 2 crore in damages. Security concerns reportedly influenced the filmmakers' decision to scrap the promotional event.

Directed by Vishal Bhardwaj and produced by Sajid Nadiadwala, the film reunites the acclaimed duo after their successful collaborations in Kaminey, Haider, and Rangoon. The teaser had previously created excitement with Shahid Kapoor in an intense avatar, featuring full-body tattoos, violent confrontations, and dramatic action sequences. Triptii Dimri, Nana Patekar, Avinash Tiwary, Disha Patani, Aruna Irani, Vikrant Massey, Tamannaah Bhatia, and Farida Jalal also star in pivotal roles.

The legal notice reportedly requests that the makers halt or delay the film's release until her objections are addressed. While the production team has not officially confirmed the trailer cancellation, media reports indicate that the move is precautionary to avoid escalation.

Despite the controversy, 'O'Romeo' is scheduled for a theatrical release on February 13, 2025, coinciding with Valentine's Day weekend. The film promises a dark, emotionally charged story rooted in unfulfilled love and its lasting consequences, continuing the anticipation built by its teaser. Fans and audiences are eagerly waiting to see Shahid Kapoor and Vishal Bhardwaj's latest collaboration, which is expected to blend intense drama, action, and romance, making it one of the most talked-about releases of early 2025.

Bhartha Mahasayulaku Wignyapthi OTT Release Details Announced

Ravi Teja's latest film 'Bhartha Mahasayulaku Wignyapthi' has hit theatres and is performing decently at the box office. Directed by Kishore Tirumala, the romantic drama follows vineyard owner Ram Satyanarayana as he travels to Spain to promote his wine and finds himself caught between two women.

The movie opened on January 13, 2026, during the Sankranti festival across Telugu states and other regions. Trade analysts report that the film has collected over Rs 4.6 crore domestically in just two days, indicating a positive start for the festive release.

The story revolves around Ram's complicated love life. He meets Manasa Shetty, who gradually falls for him, while it is later revealed that he is already married to Balamani. The film mixes romance, humor, and confusion as Ram tries to balance both relationships. The cast includes Ashika Ranganath, Dimple Hayathi, Sunil, Vennela Kishore, Getup Srinu, Muralidhar Goud, and Sathya in important roles. Mickey J. Meyer has composed the music and background score.

For viewers waiting to watch the film online, ZEE Network has acquired the digital and satellite rights.

The film is expected to stream on ZEE5 after its theatrical run, with an OTT release likely by mid-February 2026. While the official streaming date is yet to be announced, fans can soon catch Ravi Teja's festive entertainer from the comfort of their homes.

With its engaging plot, romantic twists, and comedy, 'Bhartha Mahasayulaku Wignyapthi' continues to attract audiences, and the upcoming OTT release is expected to expand its reach further.

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